



August 2012



Summer has been flying by! We saw temperature records shattered multiple times this year. Now it seems like we might be heading into fall a bit early.

We are back from our first Carnival Cruise. For those following our blog, you have my evaluation. Going on other cruise lines gives me a better perspective of what you might want in a cruise. I have personally experienced six cruise lines and toured a couple others.

One of the main reasons I chose the Carnival Cruise was to be able to complete my Elite Cruise Counsellor designation with Cruise Line International Association (CLIA). This designation is the third level that CLIA offers. These designations are not required for travel agents. Agents must complete course work, ship tours and cruises, in addition to booking requirements to obtain each designation. Several of our agents are either working on their designation or have achieved one already. While an agent without a designation can certainly sell a cruise to you, an agent with this specific training is better equipped to counsel you on the best choice for you. It is great to specialize in a specific cruise line, but an agent that sells multiple cruise lines is a better one to have in your corner.

Southwest Airlines

By Rhonda Ctvrtnik

Recently, Southwest Airlines (SWA) announced a one-day "Flash Sale" to its Facebook fans. 50% off flights, on certain late summer and fall dates. The response was so overwhelming, that it crashed Southwest's system, and as a result, thousands of customers were charged multiple times for the same reservation, and many more people never received

confirmations for the flights they did book during the sale. It was a mess, to say the least.

I had the latter happen to me. I booked a flight, and used SWA's Paypal option to pay for it. After hitting the Confirm button, I got a server error from their Web site. I did not get the confirmation page. So I went over to my Paypal account, and verified that the payment had gone through. It had. So I waited for an email confirmation. It never came.

I waited about an hour, and called SWA's Customer Service line, and got a busy signal. The line was busy all that evening, and all the next morning. Finally, the following afternoon, I got through to their voicemail, which told me that the hold time would be three hours! I could not hold that long, so I hung up. I tried again that evening, and the hold time was 1-1/2 hours. Again, I hung up.

Finally, the morning of the third day, I got through with only a 10 minute hold. The Customer Service agent I spoke with, Carrie, was very nice. She tried looking up the reservation for me, but there wasn't one there. The charge had gone through to Paypal, but the reservation was never completed in their system! So, she transferred me to the IT department, where I spoke with Tiffany, who immediately cancelled the Paypal charges, and rebooked the flight for me, at the discounted rate! Throughout the entire conversation, Tiffany was very professional and courteous, even though she had been working very long hours for the past three days, having to deal with thousands of irate customers.

In the meantime, Southwest has posted an apology on their Facebook page, to all their Fans, for the problems they had while trying to take advantage of the sale. They have also put a headline on top of their Web site, explaining the situation and the steps they

are taking to correct the problems encountered. They have worked tirelessly for three days, and will continue to work hard for many more days, to fix everyone's reservations.

Kudos to Southwest Airlines for their professionalism and timely response in handling this situation!

Money Saving 101

By Debbie Lasher

When I tell people I'm a frequent Walt Disney World vacationer, the first question I'm asked is: "How do you afford to go so often?" With that, I smile, and say, "It's easy!" I give everyone the same money savings tips. The best thing about these tips is that they work for not only Walt Disney World, but for any vacation you're saving for. Here are my top five money savings tips:

1) Save change!! I don't care if you're only buying a pack of gum for \$1.02. Never, ever pay with exact change. Pay with paper bills, and put the change in a change jar when you get home. It's amazing how quickly that change adds up. There are some banks (I know for sure TD Bank in the Northeast is one) that has free coin counting machines, where you can take your coins to be converted to paper money. If your bank doesn't have one of these machines, you can purchase coin counting machines cheaply at Walmart, Target, etc., roll the coins at home, then take them to your bank to be cashed in.

1A) Yes, there really is a 1A! This is very similar to number one on my list. Instead of saving your coins, save all of your \$1 bills. Remember that \$1.02 pack of gum? Pay with a \$5 bill. Instead of \$0.98 going in to your vacation fund, you now have \$3.98 going in to your account. Usually once per month, I take my \$1 bills to the bank and trade them for larger denomination bills so that they're not taking up so much space in my 'Disney vacation fund' envelope.

1B) This is the last subset of tip 1, I promise! Along the same line of not paying with exact change, I always round up my checkbook. Whenever I write a check (which isn't as frequent as it used to be), I'll write the check for the exact amount, but then round

the check amount to the closest dollar and enter that amount in to my register. For example, if I write a check for \$32.86, I'll enter \$33 in my checkbook register. At the end of the month, when I balance my checkbook, I'll figure out how much change I "saved" and write a check to myself for that amount. That money goes right in to my vacation fund.

2) Coupons. I'm not one of those extreme couponers you see on TV, but I do save \$15-\$20 per week on groceries and household goods with coupons. When I come home, I put the money I saved with coupons in my Disney fund. I spend between 30-60 minutes per week clipping coupons and sorting through coupons I receive in a coupon exchange through the mail (I then mail out the ones I will not use to my 'coupon buddy'), so it's not very time consuming. Assuming the minimum of \$15 per week savings, that's \$780 in savings over the course of a year. Again, easy way to save.

3) On-line rewards programs. My favorite is MyPoints, where you can redeem for gift certificates for restaurants, hotels, department stores, etc. I always redeem for either Target or Walmart gift cards so that I can make a trip to one of those stores to stock up the room with supplies (snacks, drinks, any toiletries that I forgot to pack, etc.). You can also redeem for hotel or restaurant gift certificates. Other rewards programs include Sunshine Rewards, QuickRewards, and CreationsRewards. I spend around 10-20 minutes per day on rewards programs, so again, not time consuming.

4) Vacation allowance. Yes, I pay myself a vacation allowance; it's part of my monthly budget. Just like I budget for groceries, utilities, etc., I budget \$40/month for vacations. I get paid bi-weekly, so I budget \$20 per paycheck for vacation. $\$40 \times 12 \text{ months} = \$480!$

5) eBay. I admit, this is the hardest of the 5 tips I give. This, hands down, is the most time consuming, and the least predictable. I have good times and bad times with eBay. I sell mainly books, pocketbooks, and clothes, but so nothing big-ticket, but every dollar counts, right? I figure if I can bring in

\$50/month from stuff I sell on eBay, that's \$600 per year I'm saving for vacation.

So, how do I afford vacations? It's not as hard as you think!

DJ's First Cruise By Debbie Higgins

This story begins in November 2008 when my husband asked me if I wanted to go on a cruise. He has asked me that question off and on for a long time and I always refused because I was afraid to go. Imagine his surprise when I finally agreed this time! It had to be fate that caused me to accept. How else would I have been able to meet all the great friends we made that were on the same cruise?

We were booked on a 4-day Bahamas cruise on the Disney Wonder. Having never cruised before, I was amazed for 4 days! Everything from entering the terminal at Port Canaveral, to disembarking 4 days later was fabulous!

Checking in was quick and easy. We were told that our luggage would magically appear in our cabin a few hours after boarding. It looks like Disney has that process down to a science!

Now it's time to get on board. All I can say is Wow! Once I stepped onto the ship I understood why it's called The Wonder. We made our way to our cabin and I was so surprised at how roomy it was inside. There was plenty of room for the two of us and all our stuff.

Before the ship sets sail, we went to Muster. This is so important because you learn how to use a life jacket and where you need to meet so that you can be accounted for. I felt very safe after that.

So, off we go to the Sail Away Party. What a celebration! There was music and dancing on deck, all while the ship is pulling away from the dock to begin our adventure. After the party we started to explore the ship. It was very easy to get around, with lots of signs to direct you.

Getting back to our cabin, we found a Navigator, which is Disney's way of letting people know what the day's activities are. There's so much to do and there's something for everyone!

The first night we went to a show in the Walt Disney Theater. The live entertainment is top notch. The show was over just in time for us to get to our first dinner in one of the main dining rooms. After the first night, we would alternate with the other two dining rooms, giving us a chance to sample food from all three. The servers assigned on the first night stay with you throughout the dining rotation. This is nice because they get to know you and what you like.

We spent our first full day at sea just exploring the ship and all it has to offer. We met friends for cocktails, went for a wine tasting and even checked out the luxurious spa on board.

When we woke up the next day, we were docking at Disney's private island called Castaway Cay. This is a little paradise in itself. There's a family beach for families and their children and there's also an adult only beach for those that like a quieter place. A great barbeque was offered for lunch and there was plenty of shopping, biking, etc. while on the island.

After a day of fun in the sun, we made our way back to the ship so that we can set sail for Nassau in the Bahamas. Lots of people make their way off the ship and go to Nassau to take advantage of shopping and getting souvenirs to bring home. My husband and I decided to stay on the ship because there was so much we wanted to see and do there. We had a great day exploring the ship, sunning by the pool and then returning to our cabin to get ready for our last dinner on the ship. After dinner, there was an After Party to celebrate our overnight return back to Port Canaveral. Before turning in for the night, we had to put our luggage outside our cabin door, and again it was whisked away and we didn't have to worry about it.

When we woke up the next day, we were already docked back in Florida. We went for a great breakfast, said "see you later" to our friends and disembarked the Disney Wonder. Of course, once we

were off the ship, we went to the terminal and found that our luggage magically appeared and we were on our way to rejoin our friends in the Walt Disney World Theme Parks to continue what turned out to be an awesome trip!

By the way, my husband and I booked our next cruise even before we got off the ship. If you have never cruised before, or have been thinking about cruising, do yourself a favor and go! You'll have a great time!

Hershey, Pennsylvania

Last year I had a lot of friends who traveled to visit the HersheyPark. Last Christmas, I had a client who was interested in taking her family to Hershey during the holiday break. Here is her summary.

We had a fantastic time in Hershey. We really didn't know what to expect and were pleasantly surprised. Here's a fast rundown of what we did. It was definitely a fun Christmas event. It was definitely fun to experience once. We will go back in the summer if the kids convince us to return to HersheyPark for summer fun.

The Christmas Candylane at HersheyPark was fun - everything from Christmas carols being broadcast everywhere you went, to Christmas lights everywhere, and even Santa's reindeer! And hot cocoa everywhere you went. They had a cookie decorating station, too, which was a fun thing. The night just dripped Christmas.



We spent a good 6 hours at Chocolate World, which could've been longer if we spent more time shopping.

We did everything they had to offer and the only thing that was just okay was the 3-D movie. Disney's spoiled us with those! But the rest was fun. They even had Santa come onto the trolley ride and hand out ornaments to the kids - called them out individually from his "good kids" list.

The Hershey Story museum was nice. We spent about one hour in the museum then did the Chocolate Lab, which was more hands-on than the one at Chocolate World. We ate a very good lunch at The Chocolate Avenue Grill just a couple of blocks away.

The Hershey Lights was enjoyable, too. Again, fun to do once.

The hotel was nice and the perfect location. It took us 15 minutes from the time we left the front door of the hotel to be parked and in line at the Hershey complex - it was just a straight shot down the road. The hotel site was just below a strip mall that included a KMart, grocery store, AAA office, Panera and couple of restaurants. Across the street was a Gold's Gym, a collection of fast-food and other restaurants, so the location was great. There isn't really anything downtown Hershey to so we didn't miss out on anything by not staying there. Their breakfast was very substantial and the kids loved the pool (it got lots of use!). *(Stayed at the Comfort Inn at the Park)*

So, if you have anyone who is looking for something fun and non-stressful to do over Christmas break this year, this is definitely a good option.

Thanks Jan for your comments!

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