

## Dazzled by the Dream

**Adults as well as kids get caught up in the magic on Disney cruise**

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

ABOARD THE DISNEY WONDER—There are very few places on Earth where a middle-aged woman can don a pair of leopard print mouse ears and get away with it.

The Disney Wonder cruise ship is one of them.

As I sit behind someone I will call Leopard Ears (who, for the record, *isn't* travelling with children), in the on-board theatre waiting for the evening's program to begin, it's clear that we didn't get the memo.

Dozens of families – multi-generational, international and couples-only – are wearing their mouse ears with pride as they clap and sing along with Sebastien from the *Little Mermaid*, *Tarzan*, *Cinderella* and others. And when Mickey takes the stage at the end of show, grown women scream as if Brad Pitt himself has entered the room.

Worst of all? It's contagious.

You can't help but fall for the dramatic fawnings of Prince Charming or the "about to be replaced" musings of Woody when they're right there in front of you on the stage, acted out with conviction in Broadway-calibre performances.

The success of Disney's theme parks over the years has proven that Walt was on to something with his moral-laden tales and characters, and on a Disney Cruise you're immersed in it.

It's the difference between watching a Disney movie and living one.

Even my boys, who couldn't have told Peter Pan from Mickey Mouse before we left, were running for hugs from everyone from Capt. Jack Sparrow to Goofy. You can't help but fall in line.



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Youngsters can enjoy treasure hunts, music, stories and other activities at the Kids' Club, while their parents get some alone time.

### Just the facts

Disney Magical Express service means you tag your bags with the labels provided by Disney before you check them in Canada and they appear at your stateroom when you arrive on board. No waiting for bags to be unloaded, searching for the luggage belt or lugging bags to the bus and ship.

There are currently two ships in the Disney Cruise Line. The Magic offers an alternating Eastern and Western

It's the first time we've been on a cruise ship, got off at a port and ached to be back on board because there was still so much to see and do and only four days to do it.

Everyone on board seems to be having a good time. At first I assume that someone has sprinkled pixie dust into the air ducts, but soon I discover the real reason: The Kids' Clubs.

This is the first ship I've been on where they've got the family travel thing just right.

Yes, you want to be away with the kids but that doesn't mean you want to be with them all the time. Who wants to take a vacation where you spend the entire time chasing the little ones and arguing with the big ones?

The Kids Clubs are intelligent and age-appropriate. The Oceaneer's Club offers children ages 3 to 4 and 5 to 7 activities that blend science, music, treasure hunts, cooking and more, all under the watchful eyes of trained Mouseketeer staff.

Older kids (8 to 9 and 10 to 12) can choose from activities such as producing commercials or having a water fight.

Electronic pagers you carry with you let you drop the kids off or pick them up as you please.

Drop them off when they've got energy to burn, pick them up in time for a first-run movie matinee in the surround-sound theatre and then drop them off again after dinner (they offer late-night, no-extra-charge care) while you work off your chocolate soufflé in the nightclubs.

Teens have their own hangout – The Stack – where they can go almost 24 hours a day for sodas or just to hang out. And kids 3 years and under are pampered and played with in the Flounders Reef Nursery – the first nursery at sea.

And once you're kid-free, you can head over to the adults-only Cove café, adults-only pool or indulge in dinner at the ship's upscale restaurant (\$15 charge) restaurant Palo.

Not once did I hear a child utter the fatal vacation words: "I'm bored."

Family bingo tournaments, magic shows and a new show every night make sure of that.

And while the cruise can be pricey in comparison to some other ships, we found that once on board there were few extra costs to contend with. The trip isn't perfect. It turns out that the Bahamas can get cold (it was November and only the brave took to the waters) and the mandatory fire prep drill where you stand sardine-like in your life vest under a hot sun is never a fun time.

But from the PA system announcing your name roll-call style when you arrive ("The Disney Wonder welcomes ... all the way from Canada ... theeeeeeeee DA-VIS Family") to the final farewell, which is organized and leisurely, the experience continuously surprises and entertains.

The whole thing just puts you in a good mood.

Caribbean seven-night itinerary. The Wonder offers three- and four-night Bahamian Cruises. Both ships offer stops at Disney's private island – Castaway Cay.

In 2010, the Magic will head to Europe for a 12-night Northern European Capitals Cruise that includes stops in Scandinavia, Russia and Berlin and a 10- and 11-night Mediterranean cruise with stops in North Africa, Malta and Corsica.

For more information visit [www.disneycruise.com](http://www.disneycruise.com)

And so when two pint-sized "Ariels" begin kicking my seat in the middle of the show and Leopard Ears begins swaying in front of me, I don't roll my eyes.

I shift a little to the right, pull my youngest onto my lap and openly wish Cinderella luck on the whole Prince Charming thing.

*Heather Greenwood Davis is a Toronto-based freelance writer. Her trip was subsidized by Disney Cruises.*