FREE PLANNING GUIDE · 2026–2027 EDITION

The Travel With Thomas Today

Walt Disney World Park Playbook

Lightning Lane in plain words, smarter mornings, a decision flowchart for every park, and family-friendly dining ideas.



An independent planning guide, not affiliated with or endorsed by The Walt Disney Company. Info checked Nov 2026. Disney changes things often, so confirm in the My Disney Experience app.

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A NOTE FROM THOMAS

Welcome to your Disney game plan

Hi, I'm Thomas, and I'm so glad you're here.

Walt Disney World is one of my favorite places to send families, and it's also one of the most confusing places to plan. Four huge theme parks, a booking system with its own vocabulary, and a calendar that shifts every season. It's a lot, especially when you're also juggling work, school schedules and everyone's wish lists.

I put this playbook together so you can walk into each park with a calm, simple plan instead of forty open browser tabs. It's written for first-timers who want the essentials and for returning families who want to know what's changed. You'll find straight answers about Lightning Lane, a realistic way to handle mornings, a decision flowchart for every park, and dining ideas that work with little ones.

One honest note: no guide can promise short lines. What a good plan *can* do is put your must-dos in the best possible spot, so the rest of the day feels like vacation and not a race.

If you read this and think, “I'd love someone to just handle all of this for us,” that's exactly what I do. There's more about that on the last page.

Have the best time,

Thomas Francis

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Info checked Nov 2026. Disney changes things often, so confirm in the My Disney Experience app. Ride closures, show times, park hours and Lightning Lane options can change without notice.

START HERE

How to use this guide

Read Part 1 once at home. Then bring the park chapters with you, one per park day.

Part 1 · The big-picture tools

- **Lightning Lane, plain and simple**: what each pass does
- **Choosing, booking and refreshing**: what to lock in first and how to keep adding
- **Early Entry, rope drop and late nights**: who gets extra time
- **Picking park days**: matching parks to days

Part 2 · One chapter per park

- **Must-dos** sorted by type, plus what's new or closed
- **When to arrive** and a simple morning plan
- **The TWTT Morning Compass**: a two-question flowchart for your first hour
- **Dining ideas**, quick-service and sit-down
- **Little-kid tips** for strollers, naps and heights

How the Morning Compass works

1. **Start at the top.** Answer the first question for your group, today.
2. **Follow YES or NO** to a second question that fits your situation.
3. **Land on one plan.** It tells you where to walk first and what to save for later.

A few ground rules for the whole trip

Plan the morning, flex the afternoon

The first two hours of a park day are when a plan pays off most. After lunch, follow your family's energy, not a spreadsheet.

Pick 3 must-dos per person, per park

Ask everyone for their top three. That list decides what goes in Lightning Lane and what you ride first.

Build in a real break

A midday rest at the hotel, or a long sit-down meal, keeps the evening fun, especially with kids under 7.

Check the app every morning

Hours, show times and ride status live in My Disney Experience. Glance at it over breakfast before you head out.

PART 1 · THE BIG-PICTURE TOOLS

Lightning Lane, in plain words

Lightning Lane is Disney's paid way to skip the regular standby line at many attractions. You still wait a little, just in a much shorter line. Standby lines are always still there, so it's completely optional.

Multi Pass

The everyday option. Bought per park, per day.

- Pick up to **3 experiences** and arrival windows before you go
- At Magic Kingdom, EPCOT and Hollywood Studios, only **one** of the three can come from the most popular group
- Once you use one (or its window passes), you can add another, one at a time
- Includes downloads of select ride photos from your day

Single Pass

For the biggest headliners, which aren't in Multi Pass.

- One attraction at a time, with an arrival window
- Up to **2** Single Passes per person per day
- As of Nov 2026: Seven Dwarfs Mine Train and TRON Lightcycle / Run, Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind, Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance, and Avatar Flight of Passage

Premier Pass

The all-in option, sold in limited numbers.

- One entry to **each** available Lightning Lane in one park, on one day
- No arrival windows; go when you like
- Includes the Single Pass rides
- Bought in a separate transaction

The rules that trip families up

You can only buy in the app

Passes are sold only in My Disney Experience. Link everyone under Family & Friends first, with valid park tickets, so you can book for the whole group at once.

One ride, once per day

Each pass gives one Lightning Lane entry per attraction, per day. Single Pass is tied to its one ride. A Multi Pass can add rides in another park if you have Park Hopper.

Changes yes, refunds no

You can change selections and arrival windows if there's availability, and even split your group. The passes themselves are non-refundable and non-transferable.

Cost changes by date

Pricing varies by park, ride and date, and is often higher at peak times. Check the app for your dates, or let me walk you through it for your trip.

Based on Walt Disney World's official Lightning Lane passes page, checked Nov 9, 2026. Ride groupings can change; confirm in the app.

Choosing, booking & refreshing

Do you need it? A quick gut check

Multi Pass usually earns its keep when...

- It's a busy time of year, like holidays, spring break or summer
- You're at Magic Kingdom or Hollywood Studios, where many popular rides sit close together
- You have only one day in that park
- Your group can't do long lines (little kids, grandparents, short attention spans)

You might skip it when...

- You'll be there at opening and stay late, when waits often ease
- It's a quieter week and you're happy with fewer rides
- Your day is mostly shows, animals, character meals or World Showcase
- It's a second, lighter day in the same park

When you can book

Disney Resort hotel guests, plus the Swan, Dolphin, Swan Reserve and Shades of Green	Starting **7 days before check-in**, at **7:00 AM Eastern**, for your whole stay (up to 14 days).
Everyone else, including Annual Passholders	Starting **3 days before your park day**, at 7:00 AM Eastern. With a date-based ticket, that opens 3 days before your first ticket day, for all of your ticket days.

What to lock in first: the TWTT order of thinking

1. **Decide on Single Passes.** If a Single Pass ride is a top-three must-do and you can't be there at opening, it's usually worth adding. If you'll rope-drop it, skip the pass.
2. **Choose your one top-group Multi Pass ride** based on what tends to build the longest line by late morning, not just what's first on your list.
3. **Fill the other two** with rides you'd otherwise wait for at midday. Don't spend a slot on something you'll ride at opening.
4. **Ask for early arrival windows.** The sooner you use your first selection, the sooner you can add the next one.

Refreshing for more during the day

Once you use a Multi Pass selection (or its window ends), open the app and pick another. You can keep adding one at a time until regular park closing, as long as there's availability. Return times shift through the day, so a quick look every 30 to 60 minutes can turn up a better window. Keep your slots full, and swap to earlier times when they show up.

Early Entry, rope drop & late nights

Early Entry: 30 extra minutes every morning

Guests at Disney Resort hotels and select other hotels can enter any theme park **30 minutes before official opening**, every day of their stay, including check-in and check-out days. Disney says this continues through 2027.

Not every ride runs during Early Entry, but many headliners do. Bring park admission plus your MagicBand, MagicMobile pass or Key to the World Card.

Extended Evening Hours: 2 bonus hours, select nights

Guests at Disney Deluxe and Deluxe Villa resorts (and a few select hotels) get extra time after closing on select nights, usually at one park per night. Lately that has meant **EPCOT on many Mondays** and another park on Wednesdays, rotating by season.

Only some rides operate, so check the official calendar for your dates.

Rope drop, the TWTT way

“Rope drop” just means being at the entrance before the park opens, so you're among the first inside. It's the best free tool you have, because the first hour often brings the shortest waits of the day.

1. **Arrive 45 to 60 minutes before** your start time (Early Entry or official opening). Parking, buses, security and tap-in all take time, especially at Magic Kingdom with its monorail or ferry.
2. **Have breakfast handled.** Eat in the room or grab something portable. A sit-down breakfast in the park can use up your best hour.
3. **Know your first two rides before you tap in.** Your park chapter's Morning Compass picks them for you.
4. **Don't use a Lightning Lane slot on your rope-drop ride.** Save passes for rides with long lines later.
5. **Keep moving for 90 minutes.** Hold photos and shopping for later. The shops will still be there at 3 PM.

Not staying on property? You can still rope-drop. Be there for official opening. Resort guests will already be inside, so start with a ride that isn't the park's biggest Early Entry headliner, then circle back to it later.

Early Entry and Extended Evening Hours details from Walt Disney World's official pages, checked Nov 2026. Times vary by date.

Picking your park days

There's no perfect crowd calendar, and I won't pretend there is. But a few simple patterns help you put each park on the right day.

Check the calendar first

- **After-hours party nights** (like Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party) close Magic Kingdom early to day guests, so you lose fireworks and evening time
- **Extended Evening Hours nights** can bring extra resort guests to that park
- **Holidays, school breaks and big race weekends** usually mean more people everywhere
- **EPCOT festivals** change the feel of World Showcase, so check which one is on

Match the park to the day's energy

- **Arrival day:** keep it light, like an EPCOT evening or the pool
- **Your freshest day:** Magic Kingdom, ideally with fireworks
- **Early-riser day:** Animal Kingdom, which often opens and closes earliest
- **A day you can plan tightly:** Hollywood Studios, where mornings matter most

Space out the big days

- Avoid back-to-back open-to-close days with little kids
- Add a rest or pool day in the middle of a trip of 5 days or more
- If you have a second Magic Kingdom day, put it near the end for favorites you missed

Think about weekends and weather

- Weekends can draw more local visitors and Annual Passholders
- Summer afternoons often bring short, strong storms, so save indoor rides for then
- Cooler months are great for walking-heavy parks like EPCOT

A simple way to sketch your trip

Step	What to do
1	Write your dates across a page. Mark travel days, party nights and any Extended Evening Hours you qualify for.
2	Place Magic Kingdom first, on a full-hours night with fireworks.
3	Put Hollywood Studios and Animal Kingdom on mornings when you know you'll be up early.
4	Give EPCOT the flexible spot: arrival night, a late evening or a Park Hopper afternoon.
5	Count back 7 days (resort guests) or 3 days (others) and set a phone alarm for 7:00 AM Eastern to book Lightning Lane.

PARK CHAPTER 1

Magic Kingdom: must-dos

The castle park, and the one most families picture first. It also has the most to do, so a little planning goes a long way.

Headliners

Seven Dwarfs Mine Train
A family coaster through the jewel mine. Single Pass ride. 38 in.

TRON Lightcycle / Run
A big launch on a motorbike-style seat. Single Pass ride. 48 in.

Space Mountain
A classic coaster in the dark. 44 in.

Big Thunder Mountain Railroad
A runaway mine train and a great first big coaster.

Peter Pan's Flight
A short, charming flight over London, with long lines.

Classics everyone should try

Pirates of the Caribbean
A boat ride and a great midday escape from the heat.

Haunted Mansion
More funny than scary for most kids.

Jungle Cruise
The jokes are the point.

“it's a small world”
Cool, calm and gentle.

Mickey's PhilharMagic
A 3D movie packed with favorite songs.

Little-kid favorites

- Dumbo the Flying Elephant, and The Barnstormer (35 in.)
- The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh
- Under the Sea ~ Journey of The Little Mermaid
- Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin
- Tomorrowland Speedway (32 in. to ride, 54 in. to drive alone)

Shows and evenings

- **Happily Ever After** fireworks most nights (not for day guests on party nights)
- **Festival of Fantasy Parade** in the afternoon
- **Disney Starlight: Dream the Night Away** nighttime parade on select nights
- Character meet-and-greets around the park; times are in the app

What's changed lately (as of Nov 2026)

- **Tiana's Bayou Adventure** is closed for refurbishment. Disney's schedule shows it back around **Dec 18, 2026**.
- **Walt Disney's Carousel of Progress** is closed for a reimagining and is expected back in 2027.
- **Rivers of America, Tom Sawyer Island and the Liberty Square Riverboat** closed for good in 2025 to make room for a new Cars-themed area (no opening date yet). Big Thunder Mountain is open.
- On **after-hours party nights**, the park closes early for day guests.

THOMAS'S TIP

Fireworks a must? Check that your Magic Kingdom day isn't an after-hours party night before you lock in your park days. Party nights close the park early for day guests.

PARK CHAPTER 1

Magic Kingdom: arrival & morning plan

When to arrive

Magic Kingdom takes the longest to reach. Unless you're at a monorail or walking-distance resort, you'll go through the Transportation and Ticket Center, then take the monorail or ferry.

Aim to be at the turnstiles 45 to 60 minutes before your start time, a bit earlier if you're driving.

The TWTT rhythm for this park

Morning: rides, with your plan.
Midday: shows, indoor rides, a break.
Late afternoon: the parade and Multi Pass rides.
Night: fireworks, then rides as crowds head out.

A simple morning plan

When	What to do
The night before	Check hours, parade and fireworks times, and your Lightning Lane windows. Pick your Morning Compass path (next page).
At the gate	Tap in, take one quick castle photo, then head straight to your first land. The best castle photos come later anyway.
First 60–90 min	Ride 3 or 4 attractions in one or two neighboring lands instead of zig-zagging. Fantasyland pairs well with Tomorrowland, and Adventureland with Frontierland.
Late morning	Use your first Multi Pass. As soon as you tap in, book the next one. Mobile-order an early lunch, around 11:00 to 11:30.
Midday	Shows and indoor rides (Mickey's PhilharMagic, Pirates, Monsters Inc. Laugh Floor), or a break at the hotel.

Tips for little kids

Rider Switch on the big coasters

Ask the cast member at the entrance. One adult rides while the other waits with the child, then they swap without waiting in line again. It's great for Seven Dwarfs, Space Mountain and TRON.

Find your quiet spots

The **Baby Care Center** near The Crystal Palace has changing tables, a nursing area and a calm space. Shady corners of Liberty Square and Adventureland make good regrouping spots.

Fireworks without the meltdown

Pick a viewing spot early, bring a small snack and plan a quick exit route. Ear protection helps sensitive little ones, and viewing from farther back is calmer.

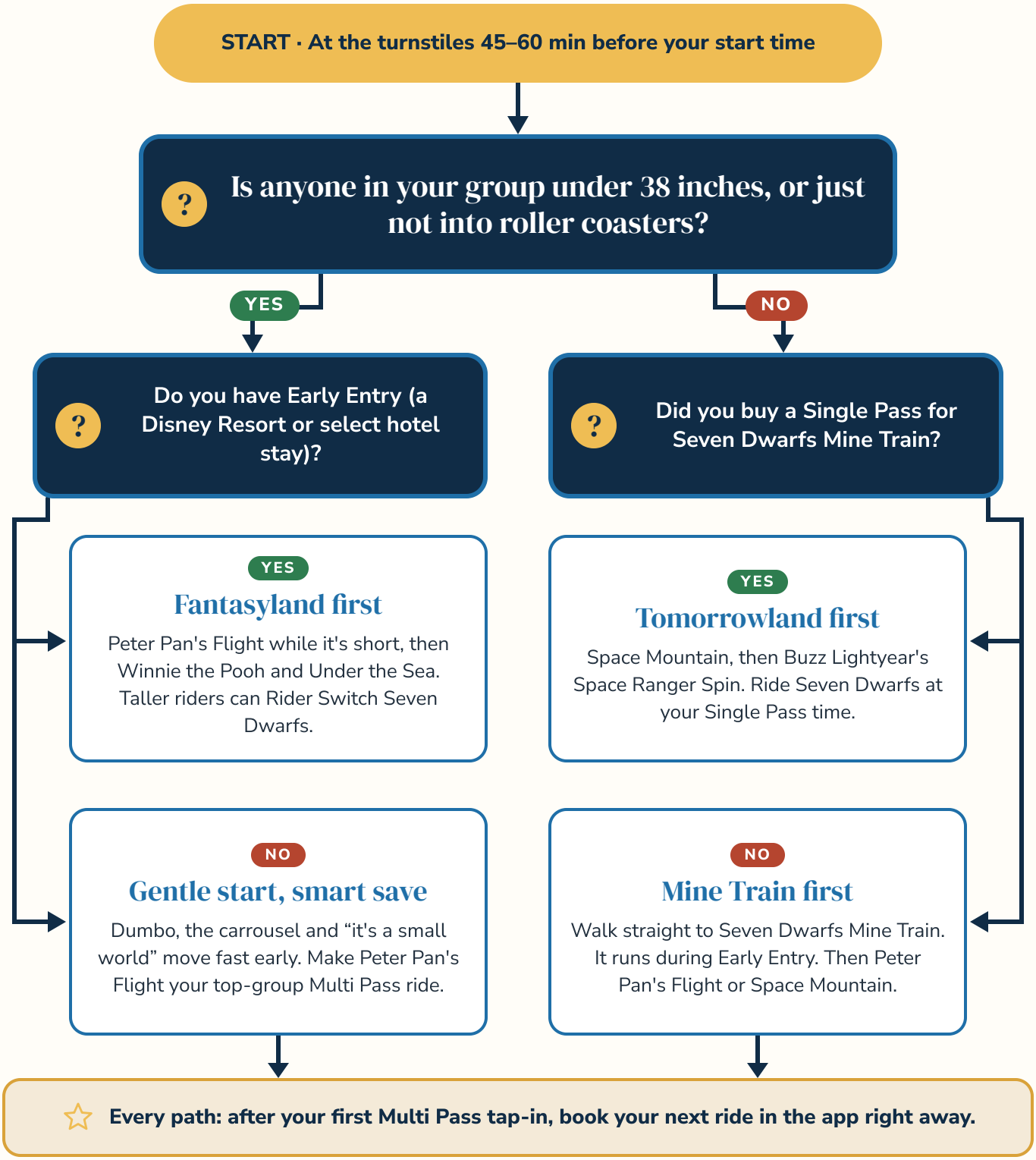
Strollers

Use the stroller parking near rides and tie something bright on yours. Cast members sometimes move strollers to keep paths clear, so look nearby before you worry.

PARK CHAPTER 1

Magic Kingdom Morning Compass

Two questions, one plan for your first hour. Answer for your group *today*.



An original TWTT flowchart. The height shown is for Seven Dwarfs Mine Train. Early Entry rides can change, so check the app.

PARK CHAPTER 1

Magic Kingdom: where to eat

Magic Kingdom food is all about convenience. Use Mobile Order in the app for quick-service meals, and book sit-down meals as early as you can.

Quick-service ideas

Pecos Bill Tall Tale Inn and Cafe
Frontierland. Hearty Southwest-style plates and lots of seats.

Columbia Harbour House
Liberty Square. Seafood and lighter choices, with quieter seats upstairs.

Cosmic Ray's Starlight Cafe
Tomorrowland. A big menu that makes picky eaters easy.

Pinocchio Village Haus
Fantasyland. A handy stop between kid rides.

Casey's Corner
Main Street. Classic hot dogs before the fireworks.

Sit-down & character meals

Cinderella's Royal Table
A princess meal inside the castle. Book early.

The Crystal Palace
A character buffet with Winnie the Pooh and friends.

Be Our Guest Restaurant
Dine in the Beast's castle.

Liberty Tree Tavern
A colonial-style inn with comfort food.

Jungle Navigation Co. Ltd. Skipper Canteen
Bold flavors and plenty of skipper puns.

The Plaza Restaurant
A classic Main Street table-service meal.

Snack stops worth a detour

- Pineapple soft-serve at Aloha Isle in Adventureland
- Sweet waffles at Sleepy Hollow in Liberty Square
- A Mickey pretzel or popcorn from any cart when energy dips

Dining reservations, quickly

- Most guests can book **60 days ahead**
- Disney Resort guests can book their whole stay (up to 10 days) starting 60 days before arrival
- Sit-down meals have a cancellation policy, so read your confirmation
- Character meals fill first, so book them as soon as your window opens

Restaurant lineups and menus change; confirm what's open for your dates in the app.

THOMAS'S TIP

Can't get the character meal you wanted? Keep checking the app. Plans change and tables often open up again, especially in the last few days before your visit.

PARK CHAPTER 2

EPCOT: must-dos

Part future-world, part trip around the globe. EPCOT rewards a relaxed pace: headliners in the morning, then food, culture and Luminous at night.

Headliners

Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind
A spinning coaster with a great soundtrack. Single Pass ride. 42 in.

Test Track
Design a car, then take it for a fast spin. 40 in.

Frozen Ever After
A boat ride through Arendelle, in Norway.

Remy's Ratatouille Adventure
A rat's-eye trackless ride in France.

Soarin' Across America
A new 2026 film for the hang-glider ride. 40 in.

Easy wins for every age

Spaceship Earth
The ride inside the giant sphere.

The Seas with Nemo & Friends
A clamshell ride, then a huge aquarium.

Turtle Talk With Crush
A live, chatty show kids love.

Living with the Land
A calm boat ride through the greenhouses.

Journey Into Imagination With Figment
Silly and short.

World Showcase

- Eleven country pavilions around the lagoon, with shops, food, music and films
- Look for **Kidcot Fun Stops**, where kids can collect a little something in each country
- Many pavilions open later than the front of the park; check the day's hours

Shows and evenings

- **Luminous: The Symphony of Us** nighttime spectacular over the lagoon
- Seasonal festivals run much of the year and change what's on offer
- EPCOT often hosts **Extended Evening Hours** for Deluxe resort guests

What's changed lately (as of Nov 2026)

- **Test Track** reopened in 2025 as a reimagined ride.
- **Soarin' Across America** opened in 2026 as a new film for Soarin'.
- Disney has announced future updates to **Spaceship Earth** and **Journey Into Imagination**. No closure dates were posted at time of writing.

THOMAS'S TIP

Pick your World Showcase direction based on dinner. Start on the side away from your restaurant, so your reservation lands at the end of your loop instead of the middle.

PARK CHAPTER 2

EPCOT: arrival & morning plan

When to arrive

EPCOT has two entrances. The **main entrance** is out front by Spaceship Earth. The **International Gateway** sits between France and the UK, handy from the Skyliner and the BoardWalk-area resorts.

Be there 45 to 60 minutes before your start time if a headliner is on your list.

The TWTT rhythm for this park

Morning: the big rides.
Midday: indoor shows and The Seas.
Afternoon: stroll World Showcase and snack.
Night: dinner, then Luminous.

A simple morning plan

When	What to do
The night before	Choose your entrance, check the Luminous time and festival hours, and pick your Morning Compass path.
First 60–90 min	Stay on one side of the park. From the main entrance, pair Guardians, Test Track and Soarin'. From the International Gateway, pair Remy and Frozen Ever After.
Late morning	Use your first Multi Pass, then book the next. Spaceship Earth and The Seas are easy fill-ins.
Lunch	Eat early near the front (Sunshine Seasons or Connections Eatery), or start your World Showcase lap.
Afternoon	Walk World Showcase in one direction, sharing snacks instead of big meals.

Tips for little kids

It's a walking park

The World Showcase loop is long. Bring the stroller, even for kids who “never” use one at home. The FriendShip boats across the lagoon give tired legs a break.

No-height-minimum heroes

Frozen Ever After, Remy, Spaceship Earth, The Seas, Living with the Land and Figment all work for the littlest riders.

Baby Care Center

EPCOT's Baby Care Center is toward the front of the park. Find it on the app map before you need it.

Rider Switch

Use it on Guardians, Test Track, Mission: SPACE and Soarin' so every adult gets a turn.

PARK CHAPTER 2

EPCOT Morning Compass

Two questions, one plan for your first hour. Answer for your group *today*.



An original TWTT flowchart. The height shown is for Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Rewind. Early Entry rides can change, so check the app.

PARK CHAPTER 2

EPCOT: where to eat

EPCOT is a food lover's park. For most families, a few quick bites plus one sit-down meal works well.

Quick-service ideas

Sunshine Seasons
In The Land. Lots of choices under one roof.

Connections Eatery
Near the entrance. Burgers, pizza and an easy meeting spot.

Regal Eagle Smokehouse
At The American Adventure. Barbecue with roomy seating.

Yorkshire County Fish Shop
In the UK. Fish and chips to eat by the water.

Katsura Grill
In Japan. A calm garden setting.

Les Halles Boulangerie-Patisserie
In France. Pastries, sandwiches and treats.

Sit-down & character meals

Akershus Royal Banquet Hall
Princess character dining in Norway.

Garden Grill
A slowly turning restaurant in The Land, with character dining.

Teppan Edo
Chefs cook at your table in Japan, so dinner is also a show.

Via Napoli
Pizza in Italy; easy with kids.

San Angel Inn
Dine at twilight inside Mexico's pyramid.

Le Cellier Steakhouse
A cozy cellar steakhouse in Canada.

Festival grazing

- When a festival is on, small plates from booths around the lagoon can replace a meal
- Pick a few booths ahead of time so you're not deciding while hungry
- Share plates so everyone can try more

Smart timing

- Book dinner about 90 minutes before Luminous so you're not rushing
- Finish eating before the show if a good view matters to you
- Mobile Order works at many quick-service spots here too

Restaurant lineups, characters and menus change; confirm what's open for your dates in the app.

THOMAS'S TIP

Kids' menus are offered at most EPCOT restaurants, and many countries have something familiar, like pizza in Italy or fish and chips in the UK. Adventurous parents and picky kids can both win.

PARK CHAPTER 3

Hollywood Studios: must-dos

Big rides, big shows, and the park where the first hour matters most. A plan here really changes your day.

Headliners

Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance
A long, movie-style adventure. Single Pass ride. 40 in.

Slinky Dog Dash
A family coaster in Toy Story Land. 38 in.

Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring The Muppets
A fast launch coaster with Muppet mayhem. 48 in.

The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror
The famous drop. 40 in.

Mickey & Minnie's Runaway Railway
A zany trackless ride with no height minimum.

More must-dos

Millennium Falcon: Smugglers Run
Fly the Falcon as a team. 38 in.

Toy Story Mania!
A 4D game that everyone can play.

Star Tours – The Adventures Continue
A 3D flight simulator. 40 in.

Alien Swirling Saucers
A gentle spinner. 32 in.

Shows to plan around

- Beauty and the Beast Live on Stage
- Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular!
- For the First Time in Forever: A Frozen Sing-Along Celebration
- The Little Mermaid – A Musical Adventure
- Disney Jr. Mickey Mouse Clubhouse Live! for little ones

Evenings

- **Fantasmic!** in its outdoor amphitheater on most nights
- **Wonderful World of Animation** projection show on select nights
- **Disney Jollywood Nights** is a separate-ticket holiday event on select nights, so show times shift on those dates

What's changed lately (as of Nov 2026)

- **Rock 'n' Roller Coaster** is now **Starring The Muppets**.
- **Muppets Courtyard**, including MuppetVision 3D, PizzeRizzo and Mama Melrose's, has closed for a new Monsters, Inc. area. Parts are expected to open starting in 2027.
- The former Animation Courtyard is now the **Walt Disney Studios Lot**, with new animation experiences and the Mickey Mouse Clubhouse dance party.

THOMAS'S TIP

Look up show times first, then build your rides around them. A well-timed stage show can be the most relaxing 30 minutes of your day, and it's all included.

PARK CHAPTER 3

Hollywood Studios: arrival & morning plan

When to arrive

Several of this park's most popular rides build lines fast. Treat opening like a show you have tickets for.

Aim for the entrance about 60 minutes before your start time, especially if Slinky Dog Dash or Rise of the Resistance is on your list without a pass.

The TWTT rhythm for this park

Morning: headliners.
Midday: the stage shows, with a seat and AC.
Afternoon: Multi Pass rides.
Night: Fantasmic!

A simple morning plan

When	What to do
The night before	Check show times and pick two shows to anchor your midday. Pick your Morning Compass path.
First 60 min	Ride your one big headliner, then a neighbor. The Toy Story Land rides sit close together, and so do the two Galaxy's Edge rides.
Late morning	Use your first Multi Pass and book the next. Runaway Railway and Tower of Terror are good fill-ins.
Midday	Stage shows. Arrive a little early for good seats, and mobile-order lunch around them.
Evening	Head to Fantasmic! early, or choose a dining package if one fits your plans.

Tips for little kids

Shows are your secret weapon

Mickey Mouse Clubhouse Live!, Beauty and the Beast and the Frozen Sing-Along give little ones a seat, music and a rest, all at once.

Rider Switch

It works on Rock 'n' Roller Coaster, Tower of Terror, Rise of the Resistance and Slinky Dog Dash. Ask at the entrance.

Toy Story Land sun

There's very little shade in Toy Story Land. Visit early or late, and bring hats and water.

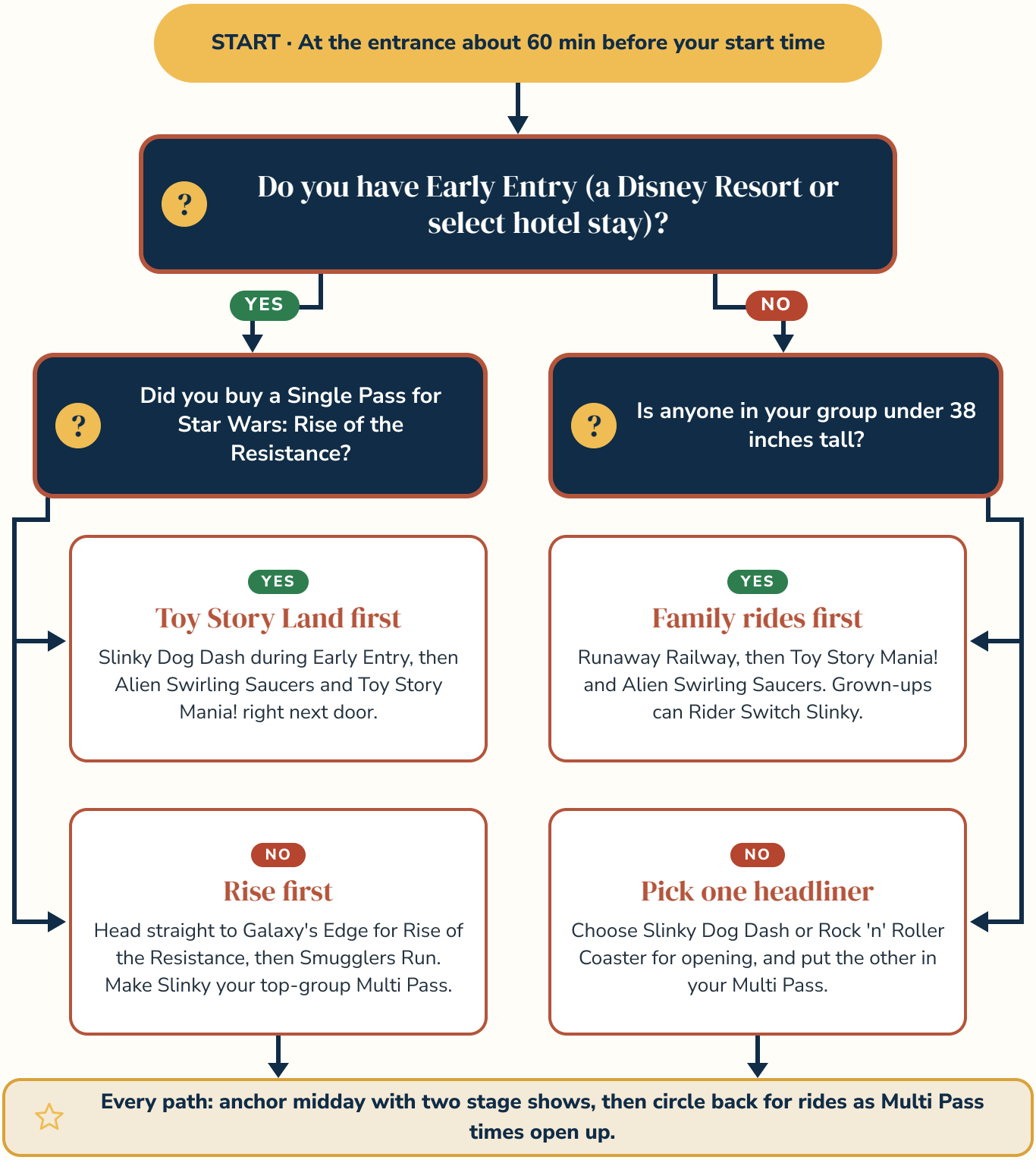
Fantasmic! and sensitive ears

Fantasmic! has fire, water and loud moments. Sitting higher and toward the back gives a gentler view.

PARK CHAPTER 3

Hollywood Studios Morning Compass

Two questions, one plan for your first hour. Answer for your group *today*.



An original TWTT flowchart. The height shown is for Slinky Dog Dash. Early Entry rides can change, so check the app.

PARK CHAPTER 3

Hollywood Studios: where to eat

Fewer restaurants than the other parks, but some of the most fun themes. Mobile Order is your friend at lunchtime.

Quick-service ideas

Woody's Lunch Box
Toy Story Land. Small menu, big fun; go early or late.

Docking Bay 7 Food and Cargo
Galaxy's Edge. Out-of-this-world plates and plenty of seats.

Ronto Roasters
Galaxy's Edge. Grab-and-go wraps.

Backlot Express
Echo Lake. Big and roomy, good for groups.

ABC Commissary
Commissary Lane. Often calmer than the busy spots.

Sit-down & lounges

Sci-Fi Dine-In Theater
Eat in a “car” at a drive-in movie.

50's Prime Time Café
Mom's kitchen, where servers playfully remind you to eat your veggies.

Roundup Rodeo BBQ
Toy Story-themed and family-style.

Hollywood & Vine
Often hosts character meals; check the lineup.

The Hollywood Brown Derby
The park's most elegant meal.

Oga's Cantina
A Galaxy's Edge lounge; book ahead.

Make lunch work around shows

- Mobile-order 30 to 45 minutes before you want to eat
- Pick a restaurant near your next show
- Eat at 11:00 or after 1:30 to dodge the rush

Fantasmic! and dinner

- Some sit-down meals here have offered Fantasmic! dining packages with reserved seating; check what's available for your dates
- Otherwise, eat early and get to the amphitheater well before showtime

Restaurant lineups, characters and packages change; confirm what's available for your dates in the app.

THOMAS'S TIP

Sit-down lunch reservations are often easier to find than dinner, and a midday table gives everyone a cool, comfortable break from the sun.

PARK CHAPTER 4

Animal Kingdom: must-dos

Lush, beautiful and unlike any other Disney park. It's part theme park, part wildlife adventure, and best enjoyed early.

Headliners

Avatar Flight of Passage
Ride a banshee over Pandora. Single Pass ride. 44 in.

Kilimanjaro Safaris
An open-vehicle safari across the savanna.

Expedition Everest
A mountain coaster with a surprise or two. 44 in.

Na'vi River Journey
A glowing, gentle boat ride with no height minimum.

Kali River Rapids
You will get wet. 38 in.

Shows & animal trails

Festival of the Lion King
A huge, joyful in-the-round show.

Finding Nemo: The Big Blue... and Beyond!
A musical with giant puppets.

Feathered Friends in Flight!
Amazing birds, up close.

Zootopia: Better Zoogether!
A 4D show inside the Tree of Life.

Gorilla Falls & Maharajah Jungle Trek
Walking trails at your own pace.

Little-kid favorites

- **Bluey's Wild World** at Conservation Station, reached by the Wildlife Express Train
- Jumping Junction animal encounters at Rafiki's Planet Watch
- Na'vi River Journey and the safari
- Character spots around Discovery Island; check the app

Good to know

- Animal Kingdom often has the earliest opening and closing times
- There's no big nightly fireworks show here, so plan must-dos for daytime
- Animals are often livelier in the cooler morning hours

What's changed lately (as of Nov 2026)

- **DinoLand U.S.A.**, including DINOSAUR and Restaurantosaurus, closed for good in early 2026. A new **Tropical Americas** area with Encanto and Indiana Jones attractions is being built and is expected in 2027.
- **Bluey's Wild World** opened at Conservation Station in 2026, and the Wildlife Express Train is running again.
- Disney has announced future work on **Expedition Everest**'s Yeti. No closure dates were posted at time of writing.

THOMAS'S TIP

Animal Kingdom works beautifully as a big morning. Pair it with an afternoon rest at the hotel, or with Park Hopper, an evening at EPCOT or Hollywood Studios.

PARK CHAPTER 4

Animal Kingdom: arrival & morning plan

When to arrive

Opening time here is often earlier than at the other parks, so double-check the night before.

Aim to be at the gate 45 to 60 minutes before your start time. Pandora is a short walk from the entrance. Africa and the safari are on the other side of the Tree of Life.

The TWTT rhythm for this park

Morning: Pandora and the safari.
Midday: shows in shady theaters.
Afternoon: trails, Kali River Rapids and Bluey.
Evening: Pandora glows after dark if the park is open late enough.

A simple morning plan

When	What to do
The night before	Confirm opening time, show times and when the train to Rafiki's Planet Watch runs. Pick your Morning Compass path.
First 60–90 min	Pair Pandora's two rides, or pair the safari with Expedition Everest. Trying all four at once means a lot of walking.
Late morning	Festival of the Lion King or Finding Nemo, then your first Multi Pass. Book the next as soon as you tap in.
Lunch	Eat early at Satu'li Canteen or Flame Tree Barbecue to beat the rush.
Afternoon	Walking trails, Kali River Rapids on a hot day, and Bluey's Wild World for little ones.

Tips for little kids

Pack for the rapids

Kali River Rapids really soaks riders. Bring a zip bag for phones and spare socks, or ride late in the day before you head back to the hotel.

Rider Switch

Use it on Flight of Passage, Expedition Everest and Kali River Rapids so taller kids and grown-ups get a turn.

Baby Care Center

Animal Kingdom's Baby Care Center is on Discovery Island, a calm spot for feeding and changing in the middle of the park.

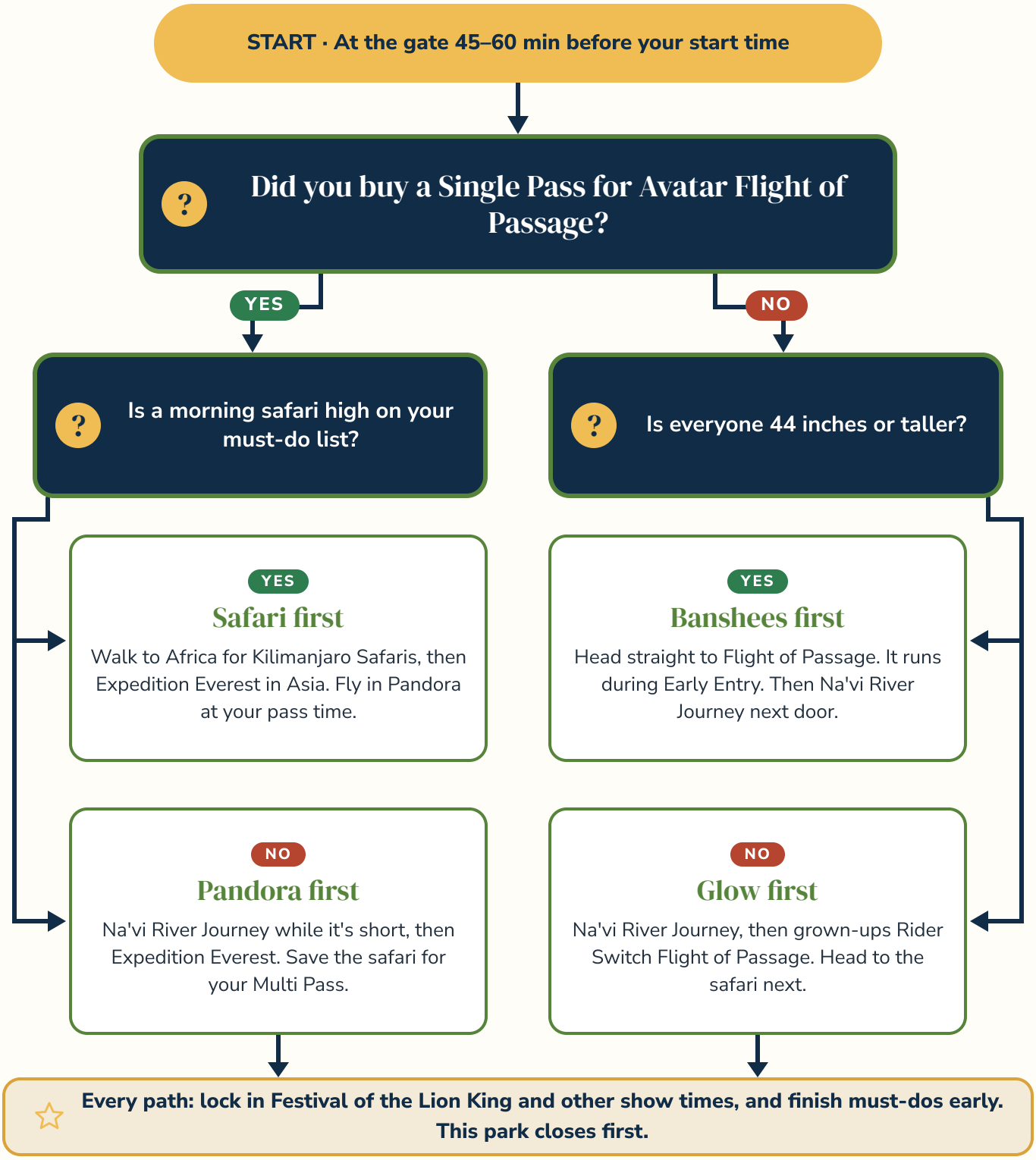
Strollers on the trails

The paths wind and get busy around show times. Park the stroller and walk the trails with little ones.

PARK CHAPTER 4

Animal Kingdom Morning Compass

Two questions, one plan for your first hour. Answer for your group *today*.



An original TWTT flowchart. The height shown is for Avatar Flight of Passage. Early Entry rides can change, so check the app.

PARK CHAPTER 4

Animal Kingdom: where to eat

Animal Kingdom has some of the most interesting park food at Walt Disney World, with flavors inspired by Africa, Asia and Pandora.

Quick-service ideas

Satu'li Canteen
Pandora. Build-your-own bowls and a crowd-pleaser.

Flame Tree Barbecue
Discovery Island. Smoked meats and shady waterside seats.

Harambe Market
Africa. Open-air stalls, plus familiar kid favorites.

Yak & Yeti Local Food Cafes
Asia. Quick Asian-inspired plates near Everest.

Sit-down & character meals

Tusker House Restaurant
A character buffet in Africa.

Tiffins
The park's most elegant meal.

Yak & Yeti Restaurant
Pan-Asian dishes in a fun setting.

Rainforest Cafe
Just outside the entrance, with jungle sounds and indoor “storms.”

Snacks & sips

- Colorful drinks and snacks at Pongu Pongu in Pandora
- Fresh fruit is a good, light pick on hot days
- Bring a refillable bottle; quick-service spots will give you free cups of ice water

Make the most of it

- A character breakfast here makes an early start feel special
- With Park Hopper, an early dinner here and an evening at another park works well
- Mobile Order skips the counter line

Restaurant lineups, characters and menus change; confirm what's open for your dates in the app.

THOMAS'S TIP

Try something new here. Even cautious eaters usually find a favorite at Satu'li Canteen, where you build your own bowl, and the menus are easy to check ahead in the app.

BEFORE YOU GO

Packing & app checklist

Park bag essentials

- [ ] Portable phone charger and cable (the app uses a lot of battery)
- [ ] Refillable water bottle
- [ ] Sunscreen, hats and sunglasses
- [ ] Ponchos, which are light and lifesavers in a storm
- [ ] Zip bags for phones on water rides
- [ ] Blister bandages and comfy, broken-in shoes
- [ ] Small snacks for lines
- [ ] Any medications, in their original containers

For little ones

- [ ] Stroller with a bright tag or ribbon so it's easy to spot
- [ ] Stroller fan or cooling towel
- [ ] A change of clothes for water rides and spills
- [ ] Ear protection for fireworks and loud shows
- [ ] Autograph book and a thick pen for character meets
- [ ] A height check at home against the ride list in the app
- [ ] A comfort item for stroller naps

Apps & tech to set up before you go

- [ ] **My Disney Experience**: tickets, Lightning Lane, Mobile Order, wait times and maps
- [ ] Link everyone under **Family & Friends** with their tickets
- [ ] Set up **Disney MagicMobile** on your phone or watch, or bring **MagicBands**
- [ ] **Disney PhotoPass** photos show up in the app
- [ ] **Play Disney Parks** app for games in line
- [ ] Turn on app notifications for Lightning Lane and dining

Before-you-go timeline

- [ ] **60 days out:** book sit-down and character meals
- [ ] **7 days before check-in (resort guests):** book Lightning Lane at 7:00 AM ET
- [ ] **3 days before each park day (others):** book Lightning Lane at 7:00 AM ET
- [ ] **The night before each park day:** check hours, shows and your Morning Compass path
- [ ] **That morning:** check ride status and the weather

Info checked Nov 2026. Disney changes things often, so confirm in the My Disney Experience app. Check Disney's bag, stroller and prohibited-item rules before you pack.

☆ THOMAS'S TIP

Do a short “practice day” at home. Open the app, check that everyone shows up under Family & Friends, and try a pretend Mobile Order up to the payment step. Day one goes so much smoother.

LET THOMAS PLAN IT

You enjoy the magic. I'll handle the details.

This playbook gives you a strong start. If you'd rather have someone build the whole trip around your family, that's exactly what I do.

How I can help

- Choosing the right resort, tickets and number of park days
- Mapping which park goes on which day
- A personal plan for your Lightning Lane and dining booking windows
- Day-by-day park plans built around naps, heights and must-dos
- Keeping an eye on your trip and sharing updates as Disney changes things

What happens next

- **Reach out** on my website or by email with rough dates and who's traveling
- **We talk it through:** your pace, must-dos and questions
- **I build your plan**, then stay with you through booking windows and changes

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Info checked Nov 2026. Disney changes things often, so confirm in the My Disney Experience app. This is an independent guide written by Travel With Thomas Today. It is not affiliated with, sponsored by or endorsed by The Walt Disney Company. Attraction, show and restaurant names are used only to identify them. Height minimums and availability can change, so check the official app before your visit.