



wait,
NOBODY
TOLD ME *that*

THE STUFF YOU FIND OUT TOO LATE ABOUT
DISNEY, CARIBBEAN & EUROPE TRIPS



REAL
DEADLINES



HONEST
OPINIONS



THREE
DESTINATIONS



FAMILY
TESTED

the friend who reads the fine print so you don't have to

BY ARI



a confession BEFORE WE START

Can we be honest? Your vacation gets decided way before you ever get on a plane. Not by the airline. Not by the weather. By a bunch of booking windows, alarm clocks, and government apps that nobody mentions until you've already missed them.

I know this because it's literally my job to know this. I'm the person setting a 5:45am alarm for someone else's dinner reservation. Voluntarily. Repeatedly. My husband thinks I need a hobby.

So here's everything I watch the calendar for — the real dates, the real deadlines, and my honest opinions about which ones matter. Use it to plan your own trip if you want. I mean it. Worst case, you'll finally understand why your friend who "did Disney easily" is lying to you.

WHAT'S INSIDE

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PART ONE

DISNEY

welcome to the Tam club

Disney is not a vacation. Disney is a project with churros.

Here's the project timeline nobody hands you.

~6
MONTHS OUT

BOOK YOUR RESORT

And here's my unpopular opinion: **deluxe resorts, every time.** Value resorts are all priced within tens of dollars of each other. Moderates, same. But deluxe resorts have a huge price range — which means you can sneak into the deluxe experience at the low end and spend the difference on something that actually changes your trip. (Or climb all the way up to the Grand Floridian. I won't stop you. I'll cheer.)

the trap

The Contemporary. The location is incredible. It is also the only thing I like about it. There, I said it.

60
DAYS OUT,
BEFORE SUNRISE

DINING RESERVATIONS OPEN

This is the morning that decides whether you're eating at the places you've seen all over Instagram or eating a granola bar on a bench watching other families eat at them. The famous reservations disappear in minutes.

REAL TALK ABOUT THE MOST FAMOUS ONE

Cinderella's Royal Table

It's an experience. You are paying for the castle and the memory. You are not paying for the food, because the food is — how do I say this kindly — not the reason to go. Book it for the magic. Adjust your taste buds accordingly.

7
DAYS OUT,
7:00AM SHARP

LIGHTNING LANE MULTI PASS OPENS

If you're staying on property, that is — everyone else waits until 3 days out, which is its own little heartbreak.

Is Multi Pass optional? *No.*

I'm not going to pretend it is. If you skip it, you will spend your entire expensive, magical vacation standing in lines. You did not spend thousands of dollars to study the back of a stranger's neck for six hours. Buy the Multi Pass.

Premier Pass

(\$129-\$449 PER PERSON, PER DAY)

Worth it for a small group that wants to ride everything without the 7am ritual. But here's what nobody tells you — if you have a bigger group and big ambitions across multiple parks, **a VIP tour is actually the better math.** Yes, the thing you assumed was only for celebrities. Sometimes it's just... arithmetic.

my rope drop confession

I don't make my families do it. Dragging half-asleep children to a park gate at 7:30am doesn't save your vacation — it turns Disney into even more of a trip than it already is. You bought the skip-the-line tools. Let your kids sleep. Let yourself sleep.

the jam: DISNEY CRUISE LINE

All the Disney magic, none of the Disney exhaustion. It's the one version of Disney where the parents actually relax too — because the kids' club is so much fun your children will ghost you for it. You'll sip something by the adult pool and have to make an appointment to see your own kids. Highly recommend.

IF YOU CAN ONLY PICK ONE WEEK

The beginning of March

After Presidents' Week crowds, before the spring breaks hit, and before Florida turns into soup. The pools are actually warm enough — January pool weather is a coin flip, and you will lose the coin flip.

PART TWO

THE CARIBBEAN

the cheap month comes with a catch



Everyone knows late summer and fall are the cheapest time in the Caribbean. Here's what they skip over: that's also the heart of **hurricane season, which runs June through November and peaks August through October.**

Do I book clients then anyway? Yes. Constantly. The savings are real (though smaller than they used to be — sorry, that era is fading). But I book those trips with one non-negotiable rule:

TRAVEL INSURANCE

not “recommended.” required.

Because here's the part nobody explains: with the right policy, if a hurricane is forecast within 48 hours of your travel, you're covered. Without it, you're just a person refreshing the Weather Channel app and doing math you don't want to do. The insurance is the difference between *“we rebooked for November”* and *“we lost everything.”*

the all-inclusive truth

SINCE YOU ASKED (YOU DIDN'T ASK, I'M TELLING YOU ANYWAY)

If you are choosing an all-inclusive **for the food**, I need you to sit down. There is no all-inclusive with genuinely great food. It ranges from “fine” to “we don’t talk about the buffet.”

But if you’re choosing one **for the kids** — the pools, the water parks, the built-in everything — all-inclusives win, easily. Most regular resorts can’t touch them for family fun. Know which trip you’re actually booking.

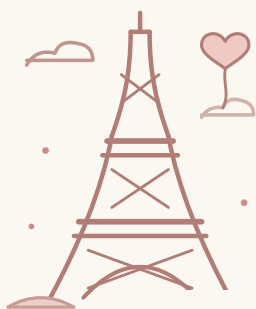
AND THE EXPEDIA THING

I’m going to say this once, with love: once you book an all-inclusive through Expedia, no one can help you.

Not the resort. Not a human. Want to upgrade your room when you arrive? Can’t. Hurricane rerouted your week? You’re on hold with a chatbot while your vacation evaporates, and you will lose your money.

(Fun fact: I actually book through an Expedia agent portal myself sometimes — but only for small hotels in the US or Europe, where nothing complicated can go wrong. Never, ever for an all-inclusive. There’s a reason.)





PART THREE

EUROPE

the border got a velvet rope (and an app)

Europe quietly changed the rules on Americans, and most people planning trips right now have no idea. Here's the current state of things:

EES

THE EU'S ENTRY/EXIT SYSTEM IS LIVE

Biometrics at the border — fingerprints, photo, the whole airport-movie moment. Depending on your airport and arrival time, it has been slow. My advice is unglamorous but real: build in extra time at the border like it's a connecting flight, because for some families it basically has been one.

ETA

GOING TO THE UK? THAT'S A SEPARATE SYSTEM

You need the UK's Electronic Travel Authorisation before you fly — it's an app, you upload your passport, you pay £16, and it's done. It is not included with anything Europe-related. London-plus-Paris families need both. Surprise!

ETIAS

ARRIVES AT THE END OF 2026 (€20)

And here's my honest take: nobody fully knows the details yet, and anyone speaking confidently about it right now is guessing. When it's real, I'll know the same week. (That's the kind of thing my email list hears about before the news articles finish loading.)

the booking timeline

BECAUSE “BOOK EUROPE 6–9 MONTHS OUT” IS ONLY HALF TRUE

2 yrs

TOUR COMPANIES

Booking through Globus, Collette, or Trafalgar? You can lock your spot up to two years out. Your flights won't exist yet — airlines don't open that early — but your trip will.

6–12 mo

BUILDING IT YOURSELF

Hotels, trains, excursions — what the industry calls an FIT trip? You mostly can't book more than 6–12 months out, because half the hotels haven't even opened their calendars. Different trips, completely different clocks.

THE THING DIY PLANNERS CAN'T GOOGLE THEIR WAY OUT OF

American expectations meeting European hotels

No elevator. No air conditioning. Rooms the size of your pantry. A “king bed” that is — I promise you this is real — two twin beds pushed together and holding hands. Larger families almost always need two rooms and almost never realize it until they're standing in the lobby.

The photos won't warn you. The reviews barely warn you. Knowing which specific hotels actually accommodate real families? **That's not a search result. That's a Rolodex.**





THE LAST PAGE

a.k.a. the part where I tell you a secret

If you read all of that and thought “*this is a lot*” — yes. It is. It’s a part-time job with no salary and a 5:45am start time.

So here’s the secret nobody in travel wants to explain to you:

*You are already paying for a travel agent.
Right now. Whether you use one or not.*

Next time you book a resort yourself, look at your checkout screen. See “taxes and fees”? Those fees include agent commission. It’s baked into the price. Book alone and that money just... stays with the resort. Book with me and it pays for a human who works with multiple suppliers (meaning I can see different price points on the same resort that you can’t), who has brand relationships that unlock perks you’ll never find on your own, and who sets the alarms, watches the hurricanes, reads the fine print, and answers the phone when something goes sideways.

Same price. One version comes with a person.

You’re not hiring me — you’re claiming me.

PLANNING A DISNEY, CARIBBEAN, OR EUROPE TRIP?

tell me your trip

START HERE — TELL ME YOUR TRIP



I’ll do the research so you don’t have to.
It’s kind of my whole thing.

— *Ari*