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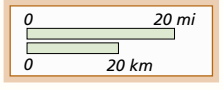
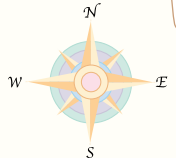
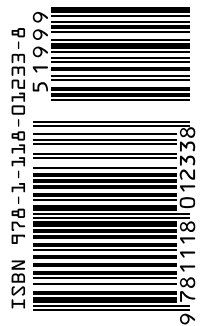
the
Unofficial
Guide®

Walt Disney World® 2012

- The latest scoop on Universal's *The Wizarding World of Harry Potter*
- How to cut your waits in line by 4 hours a day

Bob Sehlinger & Len Testa

Central Florida



THE
unofficial **GUIDE**[®]
TO Walt Disney
World[®]

2012

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THE
unofficial **GUIDE**[®]
TO Walt Disney
World

2012

BOB SEHLINGER *and* LEN TESTA

(Walt Disney World[®] is officially known as Walt Disney World[®] Resort.)



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INTRODUCTION

WHY “UNOFFICIAL”?

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

THE AUTHORS AND RESEARCHERS of this guide specifically and categorically declare that they are and always have been totally independent of the Walt Disney Company, Inc.; of Disneyland, Inc.; of Walt Disney World, Inc.; and of any and all other members of the Disney corporate family not listed.

The material in this guide originated with the authors and researchers and has not been reviewed, edited, or approved by the Walt Disney Company, Inc.; Disneyland, Inc.; or Walt Disney World, Inc.

This guidebook represents the first comprehensive *critical* appraisal of Walt Disney World. Its purpose is to provide the reader with the information necessary to tour Walt Disney World with the greatest efficiency and economy and with the least hassle.

In this guide, we represent and serve you. If a restaurant serves bad food, or a gift item is overpriced, or a ride isn't worth the wait, we say so, and in the process we hope to make your visit more fun and rewarding.

DANCE TO THE MUSIC

A DANCE HAS A BEGINNING and an end. But when you're dancing, you're not concerned about getting to the end or where on the dance floor you might wind up. In other words, you're totally in the moment. That's the way you should be on your Walt Disney World vacation.

You may feel a bit of pressure concerning your vacation. Vacations, after all, are very special events—and expensive ones to boot. So you work hard to make your vacation the best that it can be. Planning and organizing are essential to a successful Walt Disney World vacation, but if they become your focus, you won't be able to hear the music and enjoy the dance.

So think of us as your dancing coaches. We'll teach you the steps to the dance in advance so that when you're on vacation and the music plays, you'll dance with effortless grace and ease.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING GOOFY

DISNEY'S HOTEL HONCHOS are hunched down over a small architectural model of the Pop Century Resort. The smell of stale pizza and flat soda hangs in the air. The first rays of daylight begin to filter into the room, turning a cloud of all-night cigarette smoke into a blue haze. A heated discussion is taking place, one that will choose the themes for the unfinished half of the resort's buildings, covering the years 1900–1949.

Helena Handbasket, Disney's Magical Head of Marketing Magic, stands up from the table. "Okay," she says, "Tell me again what these decades had going for them."

"Well, ma'am," says Wally the intern, "It's pretty bleak. The first half of the 20th century is a litany of war, disease, and financial catastrophe."

"That's not Disney thinking!" shouts Handbasket. "It's all a matter of perspective. What were the headlines from the 1910s?"

"An influenza epidemic and World War I," says Herbert P. Quattlebaum, an outside consultant brought in to tune Disney's message to the masses. "We'll hang princess-themed gas masks in the room and have the Seven Dwarfs digging trenches between the buildings. It'll be *faaabulous*," he adds, rolling his eyes.

"The trenches would fill with water during rainy season," says Wally, "and mosquitoes would spread malaria. That's more 1940s Egypt."

Handbasket flings a lit Marlboro Red at young Wally. "How about the 1920s?" she asks, "You know, the Charleston, Babe Ruth?"

"Prohibition? The rise of organized crime? The stock-market crash?" queries Quattlebaum. "Tough message."

"Nonsense!" says Handbasket. "We'll put up words like *flapper* on the outside of the buildings, along with . . . with . . . someone help me out here!"

"How about *bathtub gin*? With in-room moonshine stills that serve soda pop?" says Wally, his voice fading faster than his career prospects.

Handbasket sighs. "The 1930s? *Anyone?*"

"The Great Depression. The *Hindenburg*. Hitler," Quattlebaum says dryly. Hope was not forthcoming.

"The '40s?" Handbasket asks before answering her own question with another question. "Oh, for the love of—can't anyone here find a perky, upbeat side to World War II?"

Quattlebaum, exhausted and ready to wrap things up, rubs his eyes and says, "Why not just bag the idea entirely, throw some oversized characters on the buildings, and call it done? If anyone thinks it's not inventive enough, tell them it's our tribute to Walt's cartoon legacy. It's our history. It's . . . it's . . ."

"It's the Art of Animation!" exclaims Handbasket, coming up with the name of Disney's newest resort.

And so it goes. . . .

What really makes writing about Walt Disney World fun is that the Disney people take everything so seriously. Day to day, they debate

momentous decisions with far-ranging consequences: Will Goofy look swishy in a silver cape? Have we gone too far with the Little Mermaid's cleavage? At a time when the nation is concerned about the drug problem, should we have a dwarf named Dopey?

Unofficially, we think having a sense of humor is important. This guidebook has one, and it's probably necessary that you do, too—not to use this book, but to have the most fun possible at Walt Disney World. Think of the *Unofficial Guide* as a private trainer to help get your sense of humor in shape. It will help you understand the importance of being Goofy.

HONEY, I BLEW UP THE BOOK!

THE FIRST EDITION OF *The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World* was fewer than 200 pages, a mere shadow of its current size. Since that edition, Disney World has grown tremendously. The *Unofficial Guide* has grown to match this expansion. (Truth be told, Bob has put on a little weight himself. Len's rate of metabolism, on the other hand, is so high that his body is incapable of producing fat.)

A mom from Streator, Illinois, was amazed by the size of the *Unofficial Guide*, writing not unsympathetically:

It had been 10 years since we have been to WDW, and I was shocked by how the size of your book grew. After going, I'm surprised that it's so small.

We have no idea where it will all end. In 30 years we may be selling an alphabetized, 26-volume edition, handsomely packaged in an imitation-oak bookcase. In the meantime, we offer a qualified apology for the bulk of this edition. We know it may be too heavy to carry comfortably without the assistance of a handcart or Sherpa, but we defend the inclusion of all the information presented. Not every diner uses ketchup, A.1. sauce, or Tabasco, but it's nice to have all three on the table.

Concerning *Unofficial Guide* content, a mom from Vallejo, California, requests that we include a map of the Orlando airport. Other reader ideas for new content included these suggestions:

- *I think your guide should have a list of attractions that provide (1) seats, (2) air-conditioning, and (3) at least 15 minutes off your feet.*
- *I feel your Unofficial Guide should include a claustrophobia rating for each attraction.*
- *I wish you'd discuss restrooms more in the next edition. I found myself constantly searching for one.*
- *We think you need a rating system regarding water [i.e., how wet you can expect to get on specific attractions]. EW = Extreme Water; SW = Some Water; M = Mist.*
- *A touring plan for wimpy teens would be helpful.*
- *I'd like to see a more adult version of the one-day touring plan for the Magic Kingdom—one that doesn't include Fantasyland, the Country Bears, or Tom Sawyer Island. Title this plan "I hate those damn bears!"*

These comments are representative in that many of you would like more detailed coverage of one thing or another. Believe me, we've debated adding an airport map, as well as hundreds of other things, but haven't done so. Why? Because we don't have an infinite number of pages with which to work, and we felt other information was more important. You'd be amazed by the wealth of worthwhile material that doesn't make the cut. What if we put it all in? Well, the book would look more at home in your hayloft than on your bookshelf.

YOUR UNOFFICIAL WALT DISNEY WORLD TOOLBOX

YOU NEED DIFFERENT TOOLS to work on your car than you do to fix your DVD player or trim your azaleas. It's much the same with a Walt Disney World vacation. If we think of information as tools, a couple with two toddlers in diapers will need different tools than a party of seniors going to the Epcot International Flower & Garden Festival. Likewise, adults touring without children, families with kids of varying ages, and honeymooners all require their own special tools.

To meet the varying needs of our readers, we've created the very comprehensive guide before you. We call **The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World**, at about 850 pages, the "Big Book." It contains the detailed information that anyone traveling to Walt Disney World needs to have a super vacation. It's our cornerstone.

But as thorough as we try to make the main guide, there still isn't sufficient space for all the tips and resources that may be useful to certain readers. Therefore, we've developed four additional guides, each designed to work in conjunction with the Big Book and provide information tailored to specific visitors. Although some advice from the Big Book, such as arriving early at the theme parks, is echoed in these guides, most of the information is unique. You might think of the Big Book as a vacuum cleaner and the other guides as specialized attachments that certain users might need for a particular job (back to tools, you see).

Here's what's in the toolbox:

The Unofficial Guide Color Companion to Walt Disney World, by Bob Sehlinger and Len Testa, is a visual feast that proves a picture is worth 1,000 words. In the Big Book, for instance, you can learn about the best guest rooms to request at the Wilderness Lodge, but in the *Color Companion* you can *see* the rooms, along with the pool and the magnificent lobby. For the first time, full-color photos illustrate how long the lines get at different times of day, how drenched riders get on Splash Mountain, and how the parks are decked out for various holidays. The *Color Companion* will whet your appetite for Disney fun, picture all the attractions, serve as a keepsake, and, as always, help make your vacation more enjoyable. Most of all, the *Color Companion* is for fun. For the first time, we're able to use photography to express our zany *Unofficial* sense of humor. Think of it as Monty Python meets Walt Disney in Technicolor.

The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World with Kids, by Bob Sehlinger and Liliane J. Opsomer with Len Testa, presents detailed planning

and touring tips for a family vacation, along with more than 20 family touring plans that are exclusive to this book.

Mini-Mickey: The Pocket-Sized Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World, by Bob Sehlinger and Len Testa, is a portable CliffsNotes-style version of *The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World*. It distills information from the Big Book to help short-stay or last-minute visitors decide quickly how to plan their limited hours at Disney World.

Beyond Disney: The Unofficial Guide to Universal, SeaWorld, and the Best of Central Florida, by Bob Sehlinger and Robert N. Jenkins, is a guide to non-Disney attractions, restaurants, outdoor recreation, and nightlife in Orlando and Central Florida.

THE DEATH OF SPONTANEITY

ONE OF OUR ALL-TIME FAVORITE LETTERS came from a man in Chapel Hill, North Carolina:

Your book reads like the operations plan for an amphibious landing: Go here, do this, proceed to Step 15. You must think that everyone is a hyperactive, type-A theme park commando. What happened to the satisfaction of self-discovery or the joy of spontaneity? Next you'll be telling us when to empty our bladders.

As it happens, *Unofficial Guide* researchers are a pretty existential crew. We're big on self-discovery, if the activity is walking in the woods or watching birds. Some of us are able to improvise jazz, and others can whip up a mean pot of chili without a recipe. When it comes to Disney World, however, we all agree that you need either a good plan or a frontal lobotomy. The operational definition of self-discovery and spontaneity at Walt Disney World is the “pleasure” of heat prostration and the “joy” of standing in line.

Let's face it: Walt Disney World is not a very existential place. In many ways it's the quintessential system, the ultimate in mass-produced entertainment, the most planned and programmed environment anywhere.

We aren't saying that you can't have a great time at Walt Disney World. What we're saying is that you need a plan. You don't have to be compulsive or inflexible; just think about what you want to do before you go. Don't delude yourself by rationalizing that the information in this guide is only for the pathological and the superorganized. Ask not for whom the tome tells, Bubba—it tells for thee.

DON'T LET THE TAIL WAG THE DOG

SOME FOLKS BECOME SO INVESTED in their plan that it becomes the centerpiece of the vacation. A Columbia, Missouri, mom, obviously intent on making every second count, offers time-saving advice that makes *Unofficial* strategies look flat-out amateurish:

Getting to the park when it opens is the key to beating the lines. To make that happen: (1) Pack breakfast on the go—you can eat your Pop-Tarts once you're on the shuttle bus, then drink your juice while you wait in line for Dumbo. (2) Send the fastest runner in your party to jump on the bus or boat; the driver will wait if he sees you coming and one of your kids is already hanging on. (3) Showering wastes precious park and rest time; the pool will do. (4) Braid your



daughter's hair. Seriously. My 8-year-old never had to brush her hair in the morning (worst case: do her hair on the shuttle bus—don't waste time in your room). (5) Ball caps for boys also avoid hair brushing and help with the sun.

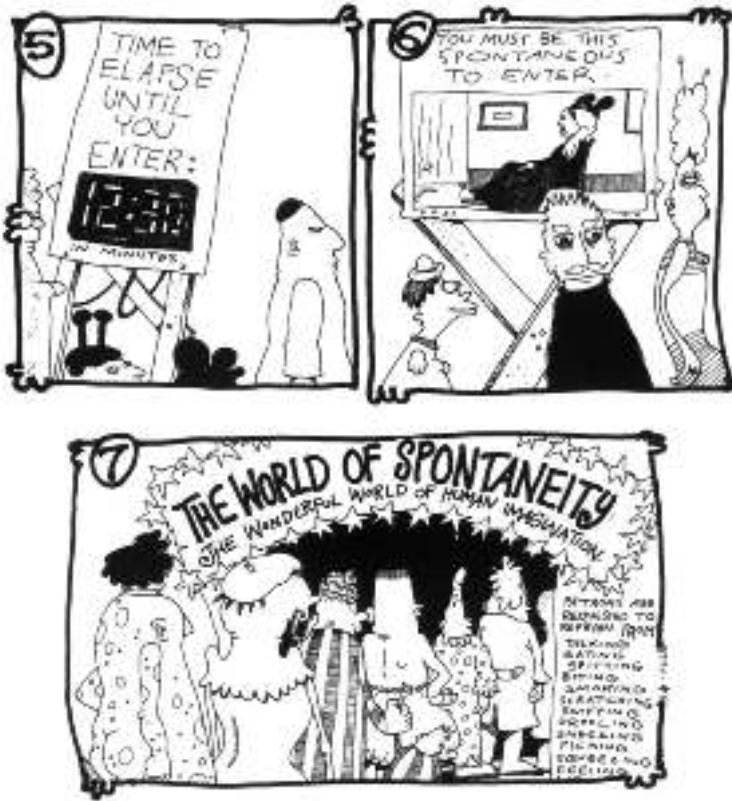
It's hard to imagine keeping up with this woman, but she apparently derived great satisfaction from creating and executing her plan. For most, however, the stress and doggedness of this approach would push them over the edge. Remember the basics: know thyself, nothing to excess, and concentrate on having fun.

CORRECTIONS, UPDATES, AND BREAKING NEWS

CORRECTIONS AND UPDATES can be found online at the *Unofficial Guide* website, touringplans.com. Also available on the site are the WDW Crowd Calendar; more than 140 touring plans; our mobile application, Lines; trip-planning and -organizing tools; a Ticket Calculator; research reports; and breaking Walt Disney World news.

WE'VE GOT ATTITUDE

SOME READERS DISAGREE about our attitude toward Disney. A woman from Golden, Colorado, lambasts us:



I read your book cover to cover and felt you were way too hard on Disney. It's disappointing when you're all enthused about going to Walt Disney World to be slammed with all these criticisms.

A reader from Little Rock, Arkansas, takes us to task for the opposite prejudice:

Your book was quite complimentary of Disney, perhaps too complimentary. Maybe the free trips you travel writers get at Disney World are chipping away at your objectivity.

And from a Williamsport, Pennsylvania, mother of three:

Reading your book irritated me before we went to Disney World because of all the warnings and cautions. I guess I'm used to having guidebooks pump me up about where I'm going. But once I arrived, I found I was fully prepared and we had a great time. In retrospect, I have to admit you were right on the money. What I regarded as you being negative was just a good dose of reality.

unofficial TIP

Check out experienced Disney World visitors' opinions of the parks in this book, and apply them to your own travel circumstances.

Finally, a reader from Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, prefers no opinions at all, writing:

While each person has the right to his or her own opinion, I didn't purchase the book for an opinion.

For the record, we've always paid our own way at Walt Disney World: hotels, admissions, meals, the works. We don't dislike Disney, and we don't have an ax to grind. We're positive by nature and much prefer to praise than to criticize. Personally, we have enjoyed the Disney parks immensely over the years, both experiencing them and writing about them. Disney, however, as with all corporations (and all people), is better at some things than others. Because our readers shell out big bucks to go to Walt Disney World, we believe they have the right to know in advance what's good and what's not. For those who think we're overly positive, please understand that the *Unofficial Guide* is a guidebook, not an exposé. Our aim is for you to enjoy your visit. To that end, we report fairly and objectively. When readers disagree with our opinions, we, in the interest of fairness, publish their viewpoints alongside ours. To the best of our knowledge, the *Unofficial Guides* are the only travel guides in print that do this.

THE SUM OF ALL FEARS

EVERY WRITER WHO EXPRESSES an opinion is accustomed to readers who strongly agree or disagree: it comes with the territory. Extremely troubling, however, is the possibility that our efforts to be objective have frightened some readers away from Walt Disney World or made others apprehensive.

A mom from Avon, Ohio, was just such a person, writing:

After reading parts of the Unofficial Guide, I seriously reconsidered going to WDW at all. We've been to other theme parks before, and I felt that WDW required too much planning. It actually stressed me out to read your guide (at first), because it seemed that WDW had too many pitfalls—too many things to plan for that could go wrong, too many horrible outcomes (like waiting for hours in scorching heat with kids), etc. My friend convinced me it wouldn't be that bad, however, so I kept on with planning the trip.

We certainly understand the reader's feelings, but the key point was that, though apprehensive, she stayed the course. Here's what she said after returning home:

Let me tell you, your guide and touring plans were DEAD-ON accurate! We didn't wait more than 10 or 15 minutes for almost every attraction in two days!

For the record, if you enjoy theme parks, Disney World is as good as it gets, absolute nirvana. If you arrive without knowing a thing about the place and make every possible mistake, chances are about 90% that you'll have a wonderful vacation anyway. In the end, guidebooks don't make or break great destinations. Rather, they're simply tools to help you enhance your experience and get the most for your money.

As wonderful as Walt Disney World is, however, it's a complex destination. Even so, it isn't nearly as challenging or difficult as, say, New York, San Francisco, or Paris. And, happily, there are numerous ways to save

money, minimize hassle, and make the most of your time. That’s what this guide is about: giving you a heads-up regarding potential problems and opportunities. Unfortunately, some *Unofficial Guide* readers add up the warnings and critical advice and conclude that Walt Disney World is too intimidating, too expensive, or too much work. They lose track of the wonder of Disney World and focus instead on what might go wrong.

Our philosophy is that knowledge is power (and time and money, too). You’re free to follow our advice or not at your discretion. But you can’t exercise that discretion if we fail to present the issues.

With or without a guidebook, you’ll have a great time at Walt Disney World. If you let us, we’ll help you smooth the potential bumps. We’re certain we can help you turn a great vacation into an absolutely superb one. Either way, once there, you’ll get the feel of the place and quickly reach a comfort level that will allay your apprehensions and allow you to have a great experience.

TOO MANY COOKS IN THE KITCHEN?

WE RECEIVED THIS QUERY from a Manchester, Vermont, reader and feel it deserves a serious response:

I read a review on the Internet criticizing the Unofficial Guide because it was “written by a team of researchers.” The reviewer doesn’t say why he thinks the team approach is inferior, but the inference is along the lines of “too many cooks spoil the soup.” Why do you use this approach?

There are several reasons. Foremost is that the team approach enables us to undertake much more sophisticated and extensive research. Collecting waiting-time data for our touring plan software (see page 64), for example, requires that more than a dozen researchers visit the Disney parks for several days at four or more different times of year. Another project, monitoring the Disney transportation system, requires riding and timing every bus, boat, and monorail route, a task that takes four researchers almost a week to complete. In covering lodging, the *Unofficial Guide* reviews, rates, and ranks about 250 Disney World–area hotels, more than four times as many as other guidebooks. On any research trip, we have one or two teams of hotel inspectors checking hotels all day long.

No other guides do this, nor can they, because the scope of the research and processing of data require time, experience, and resources beyond the capabilities of a single author or even several coauthors. An entire organization collects and compiles the information for the *Unofficial Guide*, an organization guided by individuals with extensive training and experience in research design, as well as data collection and analysis. Known and respected in both the travel industry and academe, *Unofficial Guide* research has been recognized by *USA Today*, the BBC, the *New York Times*, the *Dallas Morning News*, the Travel Channel, and CNN, as well as by numerous academic journals.

Not all *Unofficial Guide* research relates to the parks and resorts. We also conduct extensive research on you, the reader. From the concept up, you see, *Unofficial Guides* are different from other guidebooks.

unofficial TIP
 Researching and writing
 this book as a team
 results in a more objective
 guidebook for you.

Other guides are researched and developed by individual authors or coauthors, usually travel writers. Thus, everything is filtered through the lens of those authors' tastes, preferences, and opinions. Publishers of these guides hope the information the author presents is compatible with the needs of the reader, but if it is, the compatibility is largely accidental. In *Unofficial Guides*, by contrast, it's your tastes, preferences, and opinions that dictate the content of the guides. In other words, we start with the needs of our readers, identified through exhaustive research, and build a book that meets those needs.

Another reason for using a team approach is to minimize author bias. As discussed earlier, a single author incorporates his or her own tastes and opinions in his work. Our researchers, by contrast, include individuals ranging in age from 12 to 70 and sometimes, for special assignments, children as young as 8. Thus the opinions and advice in the *Unofficial Guide* are informed by the perspectives of a diverse group of researchers, a process that, we believe, achieves the highest level of objectivity.

A final reason for the team approach is the need for expertise in specific areas. No individual author can possibly be qualified to write about every topic in the vast range of important subjects that make up a good guide to Walt Disney World. Thus, our chapter on Walt Disney World with Kids (Part Six) was developed in consultation with three nationally respected child psychologists and an advisory group of parents. Similarly, we have professional culinary experts dedicated to the task of rating restaurants. Our golf coverage, likewise, is handled by pro-golf writer Larry Olmsted, and our database and touring plan program are developed and managed by programmer and software developer Len Testa. When you cover shopping, you want a local who lives to shop and knows where to find every back-counter deal within 50 miles. Guess what? We've got her! In a nutshell, there are more of us so that we can do more for you. We (Bob and Len) put the fruits of our research into words, but behind us is an organization unequaled in travel publishing.

THE UNOFFICIAL TEAM

SO WHO ARE THESE FOLKS? Allow us to introduce them all, except for our dining critic, who shall remain anonymous:

Thanks to Joe Meyer at investOmatic for his dependable programming assistance with the touring plan software. Geoff Allen supplied the brainpower behind our online hotel-rate analysis. Muchas gracias to Bill O. and the folks at Kayak (kayak.com) for walking us through their fabulous search interface.

Finally, we'd like to thank the following folks for their proofreading and fact-checking assistance: Patricia Arnold, Caroline Baggerly, Brandon Baker, Johnny Bean, Jennifer Bearden, Scott Berry, Shiraz Biggie, Isabelle Boivin, Chris Bowers, Jennifer Bowles, Annette Broskie, Steven Cantafio, Gerald Carpenter, Ann Caugh, Karen Chappell, Scott and JC Chupack, Robyne Clement, Mary Jo Collins, Tanya Conklin, Jennifer B. Davis, Diana Drummond, Ann Dunnington, Annette Forde, Rich Gairing, James Garfield, Ashley Graham, Shane Grizzard, Mary Hagedorn, Jamie Hagel, Jacquelyn M. Howard, Lisa Johnson,

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THE HOW AND THE WHY OF IT

A DAYTON, OHIO, READER offers the following comment:

I used several guides preparing for our Disney World trip. One of them dumped on the Unofficial Guide for referring to Dumbo as a "cycle ride." Though my kids are totally infatuated with Dumbo, I found your section about how the various types of rides work to be both interesting and useful. Dumbo's charm and appeal doesn't change the fact that it's a cycle ride. Get a life!

Most guidebooks do a reasonably good job with what and where. *Unofficial Guides* add the how and why. Describing attractions or hotels or restaurants (the what) at a given destination (the where) is the foundation of other travel guidebooks. We know from our research, however, that our readers like to know how things work. Take hotels, for example. In the *Unofficial Guide*, we not only provide hotel choices (rated and ranked, of course) but also explain the economic and operational logic of the lodging industry (the why) and offer instructions (the how) that enable the reader to take advantage of opportunities for hotel discounts, room upgrades, and the like. In this and all our *Unofficial Guides*, whether we're discussing cruise ships, theme parks, ski resorts, casinos, or golf courses, we reveal the travel industry's inner workings and demonstrate how to use such insight in selecting and purchasing travel and for planning itineraries. For the reader, knowledge is power, which translates into informed decisions and confidence.

THIS IS NOT A NOVEL!

THOUGH THIS GUIDE IS FULL OF CHARACTERS—and was created by a few more—it is at heart a reference work, and many readers do not read it cover-to-cover, as they would a piece of fiction. For some this causes problems—witness this angry reader who identified himself/herself as “None of Your Business”:

This e-mail is in regards to The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World, which I purchased last year for our trip to Disney World this year. I am very disappointed that the book doesn't mention that an additional fee is required to access the touring plans and crowd-level information on your website. Here is an excerpt from the book:

If you decide to splurge and burn a pass on a half day or less, refer to our *Unofficial Guide* Crowd-level Calendar at touringplans.com.

The book refers to this website in other sections as well but does not mention that a fee is involved! I don't mind paying, but I am disgusted that you would not mention it in your book.

You are hypocrites, and I will not purchase another Unofficial Guide. Shame on me for assuming this information would be free, even though I shelled out \$23.99 [Canadian] for the book.

Print this in your guide, Len and Bob.

Don't you hate it when people hide their true feelings just to be polite? In any event, None of Your Business's complaint illustrates how readers use the guide in different ways. Here's our reply to NOYB:

Dear None,

Thanks for your letter. Here's the thing:

The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World is used by many readers as a reference work as opposed to a cover-to-cover read. Consequently, a reader might miss something, say, at the beginning of the guide, that provides information necessary for understanding references to the same subject elsewhere. For several editions, we've been

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