

Ep #30: The Lowdown on Disney Races with Christine Surh



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Jill Angie

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Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you're a woman who is midlife and plus sized and you want to start running but don't know how, or if it's even possible, you're in the right place. Using proven strategies and real-life experience, certified running and life coach Jill Angie shares how you can learn to run in the body you have right now.

Hey rebels, you are listening to episode number 30 of *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. I'm your host, Jill Angie, and this is actually the second episode in the Saturday interview series. And today I'm bringing you a total rockstar guest whose name is Christine Surh.

Now, Christine is a member of my Run Your Best Life coaching group, and she's done a ton of Disney races. She knows the ins and outs of all things runDisney, and as a nice little bonus, she is also a full-service travel agent who specializes in Disney travel. So that means she knows exactly how to plan your trip and help you navigate all the logistics of runDisney events so that you can have a great race and a great vacation and a great experience overall.

And today, she's going to give you all the inside information about how to make that happen. Now, before I introduce you to her, I do have to let you know that the sound quality on this episode is a little bit rough. I was having some technical issues on my end and I didn't even realize it until after the episode was recorded. And then with the Disney races opening up really soon for registration, we just didn't have time to re-record it.

Anyway, Christine's voice comes through just fine. The problem is totally on my end, so I apologize in advance for how it sounds but I hope you listen anyway because Christine's got so much good stuff to share and you can definitely hear all of her part of the interview really, really well. Now, without further ado, here's Christine.

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Jill: Hello rebels, I am so excited to introduce you to my guest today, Christine Surh, who is a runner and a Disney runner, and also an expert in all things Disney travel races, and we're going to talk about everything you can possibly imagine today. And Christine, thank you so much for joining me here and welcome. Why you don't tell us a little bit about yourself and what you love about Disney and go from there?

Christine: Okay, well hi and thanks for having me. I've loved Disney since I was very young, as far as I can remember, so that always included multiple trips to Disneyworld, and almost - maybe almost 10 years ago I was at Disneyworld with my sisters and we were on a bus heading to the theme parks, and I saw some runners that were finishing up one of the races. And I actually took note that they weren't like, super skinny, what I envisioned as runners. So that planted a little seed in my head, and when I got home from that trip, I research all about runDisney to see what the deal was. And I actually found that fall, in October, it was actually called - it doesn't exist anymore, but it was the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, and there was a 13K, but there was also a 5K that was at the same time. So you had the full length of the 13K to finish the 5K, so it was - came out to like, a 22 or 23-minute mile. So I vividly remember the following weekend, I had a three-hour drive with my sisters down to Pennsylvania to visit my brother, and I spent the entire car ride convincing them that we could do this, that we could do this 5K. And there's plenty of time and another perk to that race was it was at night. So it started at 10pm and when it was finished, the park was open to runners only until two in the morning. So I said this was going to be tons of fun and we're going to do it, and I got them all to sign up for it and we did it. And it was awesome, and it was fun even though it was incredibly hot and humid, even at night. And they put the medal around my neck and I was ready to keep going, and my sisters not so much. They didn't do it anymore.

Jill: Once was enough for them. But I love that. Another Disney runner was born. So that was your first Disney race experience. Can you tell us a little

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bit about what some of your other races have been like? Because you've done dozens of them by now, haven't you?

Christine: Yeah, I've done - yeah, I've done several, and it's been an up and down experience. So I spent some time after that 5K doing some other races that were local like I worked myself up to a 10K, and then I worked myself up to a half, and then I got connected with a running group that raised money for the Avon walk for breast cancer, and all they did was run Disney races. So it was a group of 100 people and they capped it 100, and we raised money all year and then we would go down in January, which is the big race weekend for Disney, and everyone on the team would do at least one race. You didn't have to do - because there was multiple races in a weekend, at that time there was a 5K, a half, and a full in the January weekend. So you could do whatever - just as long as you did one of them, you were part of the team. So I went and did - I signed up for the 5K and I signed up for the half, and I finished the 5K and I got swept at mile 11 of the half. After it was over, I realized how close it was. It only hit me - at the time, I knew I was done, but Disney does have a 16-minute pace requirement, which has always been, I don't know, my Achilles heel is keeping that pace for Disney races. So I didn't finish that year, and I actually came back the next year to do the half and I was having trouble with my Achilles and I pulled myself out at mile three because of that. But then I came back six weeks later actually from that half and I finished - it was called the Glass Slipper Challenge. It was a 10K and then a half marathon. So I finished that race, and then that fall I finished another half there, the Wine & Dine half marathon. So and then I did make an attempt at the marathon and same thing, I wasn't able to keep the pace and I got swept there too. But it's all good. I mean, I learned something from each one and you know, I still go back to do - I did the 5K and 10K this year on January, and I'm going to do it again in February next year.

Jill: So you've got experience with a lot of different distances and styles of Disney races, like morning and evening and the challenges and everything.

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So for somebody who wants to do their very first Disney race and like, they hear all the horror stories about how hard it is to get into these races, do you have any - let's start from the very beginning. So imagine that our listener has wanted to do a Disney race, has no idea how to get started. First thing to do obviously is pick a race and register. What does one do to register? What's that process like?

Christine: So I can tell you how it's been in the past, but this year is going to be a brand-new system. But in the past, Disney used Active.com, which a lot of races use that as their registration system, and what would always happen is it would go on sale at Tuesday at noon and people would get in and then the website would crash and then other people would get in and it would crash, and then by 12:30 it was all sold out and people that got booted out because it crashed tried to get back in and it's always been sort of an ugly situation. It has calmed down a little bit in terms of the frenzy of registration in the past few years, but for whatever reason, this year, Disney is not using Active.com for registrations for 2019. So they're going to be registering through the runDisney website. So to register this year, if you have ever bought anything at the Disney store or ever taken a Disney trip, you already have a Disney account that you can log in with, and you can actually go right now to rundisney.com and try your log in and see if it works. And then you'll know that you have an account there. If not, you'll need to make one.

Jill: Okay, alright, so that's good to know because this episode is coming out on July 14th and the races open in five days after that I think. Thursday, July 19th, you said?

Christine: Yes, the 19th they open for January weekend in 2019.

Jill: Okay, alright, so we're already - like, if you want to register for a 2018 race, are they all full up?

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Christine: I just looked the other day, the only thing that's left is for Wine & Dine, which is the beginning part of November. The challenge is left. So the challenge is the 10K and then the half marathon the next day. So there was spots at this time, there was spots open for that.

Jill: Only if you want to register for both of them.

Christine: Yes.

Jill: So basically, if you want to just - like, if you want to do one of these challenges, do you have to register as a challenge or?

Christine: If you want to do the challenges, you have to register as the challenge. If you register for the two races separately, you can do both races but you won't receive the challenge medal.

Jill: And that's the key. This is why people want to register for multiple races in the same weekend. They get some pretty major...

Christine: Yeah, the bling - the Disney bling is pretty awesome.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: For the 5K and up there's still - every race gets an awesome medal.

Jill: That's so nice. Okay, alright, so basically, the races that are going to happen in January 2019, they're opening in five days. And so what time of day do they - is it still going to be noon?

Christine: Yes, it's still at noon.

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Jill: Alright, so everybody should basically go right now and make sure that their log in works.

Christine: Yes, make sure you have an account that works at rundisney.com or create one if you don't have one.

Jill: So rundisney.com, and they can create one before...

Christine: Yes, it's a good idea to create it before and then I would suggest logging into it at about five to 12 and just keep hitting refresh until it works.

Jill: Feel like it's an episode of The Big Bang Theory and everybody's trying to get into Comic-Con.

Christine: I've seen people, my friends in their cubicle at work and they put like, the yellow caution tape around them like don't talk to me, it's 12 o'clock because I have to register.

Jill: I love this. Like, Disney fans are no joke. Like, they are very, very serious about - not just the races but like, the whole experience. It's so good. Okay, so in July we're opening for six months away and then but then obviously there are races at February and...

Christine: Yeah, there's August 7th is actually the registration for Princess Weekend, and that's in February. Late February, and then August 28th is registration for Star Wars weekend, which is in April.

Jill: That one is Florida or California?

Christine: They're all right now in Florida. California is on hiatus for races right now.

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Jill: That's good to know. I did not know that. So basically Florida - like, any Disney race that you register for is always going to be in Florida?

Christine: It's always going to be in Florida. There is a race weekend in Disneyland Paris, but that's this whole other thing. It is a Disney race but it's not necessarily run by runDisney, so it has its own kind of registration and travel packages that are totally separate from runDisney.

Jill: Okay, alright, that's good to know because I would have just gone to runDisney. That's on my bucket list is to do one of the Disney Paris races, so we'll probably be chatting. I'm ready to go to Paris and do the Disney race. Alright, so they sell out fast so you have the best chance at getting in if like, you're just on it. Like, don't wait until the next day. Like, you want to make sure you're going to get in. And can they find - can people find the dates that they open right there on the website?

Christine: There's an events tab, and if you just click on that, then you'll - it'll open up to a box that shows all the races and all the registration dates.

Jill: Oh, good. Okay, so alright, so let's fast forward to I got on at five minutes to 12, I put the caution tape around my desk, nobody bothered me and I got into the races. Is the Dopey Challenge in January?

Christine: Yes.

Jill: Alright, so let's just go all the way there. I got into the Dopey Challenge, or maybe I just signed up for the 5K, whichever. Now, okay, so it's like, six months from now is the race and I'm going to train and I'm going to do all those things but like, there's a whole bunch of travel that like, I live in Philadelphia, the races are in Florida. Where do I start to figure out how to get myself down and where do I stay, how do I get to the race site? I feel like there's a lot to know.

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Christine: There's a lot of logistics for all the races because there's like, 25,000 runners that do the half and the full. And it's smaller for the 5K and the 10K, but it's still a lot of people. So one of the first things I recommend is thinking about who you're going to go with. I took my husband on several of the weekends, but he has told me that he no longer needs to attend runDisney weekends because they start very early in the morning, which means you're going to bed early at night, and he felt like he spent a lot of time sitting around waiting for me or going back to the hotel and being in bed at eight o'clock because I had to get up at two o'clock in the morning.

Jill: That's dedication.

Christine: I now go with my friends who also do the runDisney races so that we all are getting up at the same time and having the same experience.

Jill: So would you suggest if it's your first runDisney race to go with somebody else who's already done one?

Christine: That would be great if you can because they'll kind of know all the ins and outs and the logistics of the weekend.

Jill: So what is this business about having to go to bed at eight o'clock at night and then getting up at...

Christine: All the races start at 5:30 in the morning, and so many people that have to get to the race site, as long as you're staying on one of the Disney hotels, there's buses that go from all the hotels to the race start. But because of how many people, they start picking up at either three or 3:30. I think 3:30 is the first bus in the morning. And you kind of want to be on the first bus because traffic tends to back up and you don't want to be anxious. Or at least I don't about - nervous about getting to the crowds and getting started in the right frame of mind instead of being frantic and worried that you're going to be late.

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Jill: Well, and here's the thing: you're making a pretty big investment. It's not like Disney is next door to most people, right? It's - especially if it's not just you. Maybe you're going with girlfriends or you're bringing your family down there. We're talking a pretty big chunk of change and especially if you're staying at a Disney property. So yeah, you want to be - you don't want to be stressed out about whether or not you're going to run this race that you've just spent thousands of dollars, especially to run.

Christine: If you're worried about your pace and you're worried about the sweepers, you want to get into your corral as soon as you can and get up to the front of it. The timing starts when the last person crosses the start line. So the closer you can get yourself to starting, the more of a cushion of time you'll have.

Jill: Good, that's good to know. So for the 5K, is there a pace requirement for the 5K?

Christine: No, the 5K, they say on the website that it's a 16-minute mile, but it's untimed and it's never been swept.

Jill: Okay. So that's good to know. So if you're thinking, I'm doing like, an 18-minute mile, I really want to do a Disney race, you're going to be okay.

Christine: Yes.

Jill: It's more like the 10K or half marathon where you have to...

Christine: It's serious from the 10K on. But from the 5K, I have seen them - I was with a bunch of my friends one time and we stopped at every character stop we could on the 5K, we didn't care what our time was and we were pushing about a 27-minute mile by the time we were done, having fun along the way, and we did see behind us that they sort of cut the

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course a little short, they cut out a loop because they were trying to hurry it along so that people would finish. But no one's ever been swept.

Jill: Okay. And so I mean, you just mentioned about the character stops, because it's not like a regular - like in Philly, you get out there to do a half marathon, like get busy, get down to business, run the damn thing. But in Disney, it's - there's all of these things to see and do along the way and then you're still trying to keep a 16-minute time limit in your mind, so how do you balance that? Do you say like, okay, get three character stops, or...?

Christine: Yeah, that's why as much as the paying what it costs to do a Disney 5K sometimes kills me, I still always do it because it's no pressure, it's super fun and you can stop for as many characters as you want and not feel that pressure. Once I get into a 10K or a half at Disney, it's fun to look at the characters and see who's along the course but I don't have time to stop for them in order to maintain that pace. I was fortunate when I did the Wine & Dine half marathon that I had - which I guess we could talk too about corral placements, but I had a really good corral placement. I was about half way up so I knew I had a very good cushion in terms of the sweeping. So my goal was to finish and to take one character picture. And so I was about mile eight and I looked at my pace and I was actually even on a 16-minute mile so I knew I had plenty of time and I stopped for my picture and then I finished the race from there.

Jill: So yeah, let's talk about corral placement because don't you have to have evidence of a certain qualifying time?

Christine: Yes, so for the 10K and for the half, you can submit a 10K or better. 10K's fine to submit a time for the half marathon, or a 10 miler if you can find one of those, that's fine also to submit for time for the half marathon. And then for the full, you have to submit a half marathon time.

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Jill: And so you submit your time and then that time determines which corral you're going to be in?

Christine: Yes. And that has actually changed recently too. It used to be they had corrals A through P, and so it was kind of very distributed based on your pace. Now there's lots of theories as to why this happened, maybe Disney didn't want to have to check all these times. So now, basically if you're not doing a 12-and-a-half-minute mile or faster, you don't submit any time. You just make an estimate of your finish time and that's it, and they group everyone from that pace and slower in these two end corrals. And so it was a little - that happened in January when I was there and it was a different experience because we had - you know, 16-minute pace and a 12-and-a-half-minute pace is kind of a big difference, and we were all in the same corral. So when it started, it was a little - until it spread out, it was a little hairy because you had people that were trying to run past and people that were slower and trying to stay to the side but it was a different experience. So I don't know if that was just an experiment or if that's going to continue. We won't really know until registration happens.

Jill: But if it is the case that you're in one of those last corrals, you want to be as close to the front of that corral as possible.

Christine: I think actually this January, I had the experience of being in the last corral, which has never happened to me before, and I got there super early and I was in the front, and I knew that I was going to be hugging a 16-minute mile for that race and I didn't want to get swept, and I was maybe two people from the front corral, but as they led the corrals around from the staging area, people ran around the side to try to get in front and I ended up more like halfway back in the corral. It was just kind of the mentality of like, nobody in that corral wanted to be swept so they were trying to push forward as much as they could. So it wasn't really a fun starting experience.

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Jill: Yeah, everybody starts off like everybody was kind of panicking a little bit.

Christine: Yeah. The other good thing to know is there are points at which you can no longer be swept. So on the 10K, at about mile three and a half is the last point that they'll sweep. So once you get past that point, you're safe to finish the race and you won't be swept from there.

Jill: That's good to know. So you can like, maybe push it a little bit to get to that point and then that's when you take your character pictures, right?

Christine: Yes.

Jill: So I mean, that's so interesting. I know there are probably people thinking like, I'd love to do a Disney half marathon but I don't want to get caught in this big push and shove situation in the beginning. So how do you go into that? Do you go in thinking like, alright, it is what it is, they are anxious about this and I'm just going to relax and have a good time, or what do you do with that?

Christine: Yeah, I mean, if you're not worried about the sweepers, I guess it doesn't really matter where you start in that corral, so you can calm down a little bit. I mean, I definitely felt the frenzy and the pressure being in that last corral and wanting to make sure that I finished. And the other piece of it is the sweeping points have changed over the years. So I thought the last sweep might be mile three, three and a half, but I had also heard that other years they still swept at mile seven. So even once I got past that point, I saw the buses and I passed them and I knew I was okay, but then I still was in the back of mind like, wondering is there still going to be another point at mile five. So I mean, the closer you can get yourself to a comfortable, I would say like, 15, 15-and-a-half-minute pace, the better off you are because then you're not so close to that cut off and when you're in a race and there's that many people, you can't always get to your pace

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right away, especially in the beginning. So you have to allow for that in terms of time.

Jill: Right, that's a great point because in the beginning you're probably going to be slower while literally thousands of other people are trying to get...

Christine: There's some known bottlenecks on the courses. Like, the half marathon runs through Cinderella's Castle, which is of course awesome, and there's a photographer that takes your photo as you run through, but because people kind of want to slow down at that point and have a great photo coming through the castle, it sort of bottlenecks. So that's another place where sometimes people end up walking at that point because you can't run because everyone has slowed down to try and get their great castle picture.

Jill: Not all magic in the magic kingdom.

Christine: I have a runDisney shirt that says, "Run Disney, every mile is magic," and people say, "Oh, that's so cute," and I was like, well it's not always true.

Jill: Right, because I mean, I think everybody thinks of like, oh it's the happiest place on earth, blah, blah, blah, but there - from what I've heard, there are - like, fair amount of each race course is through either a parking lot or not the prettiest part of the park. And so I don't know, was that a surprise to you the first time you did a Disney race?

Christine: It wasn't a surprise because I was with other people that had done them before, and the course maps are out that you can kind of look at them and see what it's like. And its different experiences based on who I was with. Like, when I was with a group of friends and we were doing the 5K together, there was about 15 of us and we didn't care if the first three

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miles were through the parking lots because we were fooling around and talking and laughing and having fun. But when it's the 10K and it's the same thing, that the first three and a half miles is through the parking lots and the highways and there's a big overpass so there's a hill to deal with, trying to keep your mind on the pace and everything and you're by yourself, then that's kind of a different experience.

Jill: So I mean, we've just talked about a lot the more negative aspects of the races. How do you feel - like, if somebody's going into it knowing like, okay, the first more than half of the 10K is going to be through a parking lot, there's going to be a big hill and so forth, like, what are some suggestions that you have to keep yourself positive? Because the reason people are doing a Disney race is because it's at Disney and there's a lot of like, fun aspects to it. So how do you balance that?

Christine: I just really make sure I have good stuff to listen to for the times that I was by myself. So either music or even just podcasts just to keep myself going. And then I just kind of get in the zone like, head down and let's just go until we get to the good parts. And you know, you get into the parks and then you get that little rush of adrenaline and then you get back out onto the highway and then you have to settle back in, but there's enough, especially on the half marathon course, there's enough of the park time. Unfortunately, the one - my favorite course doesn't exist anymore. The Wine & Dine half was at nighttime and it went through three of the four parks. So that did have highways but it did have a lot more park time than some of the other races.

Jill: [inaudible]

Christine: They changed it to a morning race and they changed the course around. They were having difficulty with the evening races and thunderstorms.

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Jill: Yeah, I heard that. I heard that like two or three years in a row, right? They had to shorten it or cancel it.

Christine: One year they shortened it to a 10K and then actually, I think that was the following January, on marathon weekend, which is all four, 5K, 10K, half and full, they actually ended up cancelling the half marathon because of thunderstorms.

Jill: Yeah, because it's Florida.

Christine: And when you have that many people, you can't have 25,000 people out on a race course and then have a thunderstorm where you put people.

Jill: Right, right. And so do all of the races finish in the park? So like, they maybe start outside but they finish right in the park?

Christine: All of the races finish just outside of Epcot, in basically Epcot's parking lot. But there's a big finishing shoot, and for the half and the full, there's actually a big gospel choir that's right as you turn the corner to the finishing shoot, there's a big gospel choir that's singing and there's usually at least one character right at the finish line. And runDisney has the best race announcers, and they're always there too.

Jill: That's good. But each course is different. So the Star Wars one will go through the Star Wars park when it opens. Is it like that kind of?

Christine: I don't really know what the Star Wars course was. Once that - obviously when Star Wars land is open, I'm sure that will be part of it, and that course might have started at Wide World of Sports, but most of them start and finish outside of Epcot.

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Jill: Alright, so we talked a lot about race day and so basically, you need to - if you're staying in the parks, get a shuttle, if you're not staying in a park...

Christine: If you're not staying in a park you have to drive and you can do that. You just leave yourself a lot of extra time because it starts - traffic starts to build up and you don't want to be panicked about getting there.

Jill: So basically, leave the night before. Sleep in your car.

Christine: Because of the whole logistics, you end up having a long wait time when you get in your corrals if you've done the thing of getting there on the first bus. You could wait up to two hours waiting for the race to start. So some people do like to drive, even if they're staying on property, if they have a rental car or their own car because they like to be able to sit and hang out in their car before they walk into the corral instead of having to stand outside before the race starts.

Jill: So they can park in like, the big huge enormous parking lots?

Christine: Yes.

Jill: Just like if you were going to the park for the day.

Christine: Yes. You park over by the side where all the run stuff is happening. So you're not far from where the start and the finish are if you drive.

Jill: Okay, alright. That's probably what I would do if I went.

Christine: Yeah, as many gazillion times as I've been to Disney, I cannot drive my way around there. I'm always taking the buses so I don't really pay attention to where I'm going.

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Jill: You're like, I would just get lost.

Christine: My friends, they have driven it.

Jill: So you're there, so you get there, it's like, I don't know, three, four in the morning, you're in your corral, what do you do for that period of time?

Christine: Yeah, I mean they do always have a DJ trying to hype everybody up. There are sometimes characters that you can go take your picture with right there before the race even starts. And again, it comes down to if you're worried about your pace or if you're not. If you're not really worried, you can hang around that area and kind of have more fun with what's going on there, but if you're worried about your pace or in finishing, then as soon as they say the corrals are open, you beeline for the corrals.

Jill: So my advice to anybody, if it's your first time, spring and - go bring Christine. Find out what race she's going to and just do everything she says because it sounds complicated to me and it probably isn't when you've done it a couple times, but like, as a newbie, I think I would be very like, nervous about...

Christine: They do give out plenty of documentation. I know, it is a little crazy, but there is a lot of documentation that you get prior to even going. They have information on the website as far as expo, how to pick your bib up and stuff when you get there and go shopping.

Jill: We didn't even talk about the expo. So that takes place, what, the day before?

Christine: It takes place the day before the 5K, but it'll continue the whole rest of the time up until the day - the day of the marathon they might still have it because you can still go and buy whatever's left of runDisney merchandise but yeah. So if you're going in January and your race isn't

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until the third day and you're not getting down there later, the expo will still be available to you.

Jill: And so that's where you can buy all the runDisney merchandise?

Christine: Yes.

Jill: Can you buy that in the parks as well or is it only at the expo?

Christine: Only at the expo. And sometimes when the race weekend is over, they'll shift some of the stuff that's left over over to Disney Springs, which is their shopping and restaurant area, and you might be able to find some stuff there.

Jill: It's like, a whole new world for me.

Christine: Here's a tip too, if it's your first time and you want to go to the expo on the first day, don't go when it opens because the lines are insane. Wait until about three, four o'clock in the afternoon and then go over and you'll pick up your bib with no line and have the shopping area to yourself.

Jill: That's good to know. Because it's Florida so it's hot. There you are standing in line, I can't even - that does not sound like fun. So three, four o'clock the day before.

Christine: Yeah.

Jill: Okay. So let's talk about like, where are the best places to stay? And you're a travel agent, so you like, know all the ins and outs. Where do you recommend?

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Christine: It almost doesn't matter. I mean, the shuttles are available from every hotel to the expo as well as to all the races. It just depends if you want a luxury room versus a value room, which is going to be a little less expensive, and who you're bringing with you. If you have your family with you, they might want to have a resort that has better pools or better amenities for them to use. If you're going with - I've done packages for they're just two people, they're just there to run the races and then they're going home, so they don't want to spend a lot of money on the room. So everyone just kind of has their preferences. Same as when they just book a regular Disney vacation. And in terms of running, it doesn't - it really doesn't matter. The buses all run pretty much the same.

Jill: That's good to know. So you really can't go wrong. It's not like - because I know with some of the California races I've heard that there are certain hotels that are closer to the start line, but it sounds like with Florida it doesn't matter.

Christine: Right outside the start line. So you could just roll out of your bed and just walk right over to the corral in California. But here, even if you think you are close to the start line, you're not allowed to walk to the start line because they used to have - there are some hotels that are pretty close and would be walkable, but they had to stop allowing people to do that because it wasn't really safe in the dark to be crossing kind of wooded areas that people were crossing through to get to the start area.

Jill: So no matter what, you're going to have to either take a bus or drive yourself.

Christine: Yes, or the monorail is an option if you're staying at one of those resorts.

Jill: See, that sounds like fun to me, taking the monorail for the race. I love that.

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Christine: Yeah.

Jill: So what are some of your favorite - because you know all of the best deals. Like, how to put together like, the best package for somebody. So can you give us an example of like, what your - like, what's your favorite package to put together for somebody running?

Christine: Well, just the agency that I work for, we actually put together discount packages just for the race weekend. So we'll have all the dates covered for each of the races and then we don't have every single hotel available, but we'll have a couple of the lux hotels, a couple of moderate hotels, and a couple value hotels, and then you could add tickets to that as well. Again, I think it depends on who you're going with. If you're going with your family, you might want to be able to add the dining plan, which is not an option with our discounted packages, and then you would just do a regular Disney package. But other than that, it's pretty much the same as Disney packages, just at a discount for the race weekends.

Jill: And I mean, I think every - it's just a little secret. I am planning to go to Disney. I haven't been to Disney since I was about 24, which is 26 years ago now. Really, like, maybe even longer. I think it was like, 1991. Alright, anyway, showing my age here. I haven't been to Disney in 27 years and I really, really want to go but not until they open the Star Wars park. So I'm like, super excited. But I'm thinking to myself like, I'm like, overwhelmed at like, what hotel do I book, like, how do I - what flights to get and do I book a dining package or do I just kind of wing it, and then I hear all these horror stories about like, reservations at the restaurant six months in advance. So how does that work? I haven't worked with a travel agent in forever. I just book my own flights and everything, but like, when I think about booking a Disney vacation, I don't want to mess it up. I want to make sure I'm working with somebody who actually knows everything. So like, what do you do with somebody who's like, okay, I'm going to run this race, or I want to bring my

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whole family down, like, what kinds of things do you offer them? How does that whole thing work?

Christine: So yeah, like you said, reservation dates are pretty important. So 180 days out from your travel date, you can make dining reservations, and I know that sounds insane, but that is the nature of things. And if you are by yourself or with your family and you want to dine at those premium kinds of meals that - like a character meal where the characters come around to you, those are very popular and can easily be gone for the day that you want them at 180 days. So that's something that I send reminders to my clients of when those dates are, and some clients just like to do that. I mean, I understand because I like to do it too. So if they want to do it for themselves they're totally welcome to do it for themselves, but I have many people who are like, I can't deal with this and I don't want to do it, and then I will work with them to even come up with an itinerary as to what parks are good to do in what order or what you might want to do with each of your days. And then I'll make suggestions as to places they might want to eat, and then once they come down to what they've decided they want to do, I go ahead and take care of making their dining reservations. It's similar to registering for the race because they open at 6am on the morning of your 180 days, and you need to be online at 6am and get your dining. And then the second piece of it is fast passes. Do you know what fast passes are before I keep going?

Jill: I don't. I'm sure everybody who's listening does, but I have no idea.

Christine: Fast passes are basically like making a reservation for a ride. So you can have three per day in one park. And after you use your three, you can get more. But you start off 60 days before your trip, you can make your fast pass reservation. So that's another piece of deciding now you've got your dining reservations, so the next piece is to work on fast passes. Like, what rides are your priority and then it's the same thing of logging in, being

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online, that one's 7am, and making your fast pass reservations for the day. For each day of the trip.

Jill: So you're like, really good at typing really fast at like, 6am.

Christine: Navigating Disney's website, which is always interesting.

Jill: Yeah, I mean, for somebody like me, and I'm a really do it yourself-er, I'm the kind of person like, I used to work in corporate and we had an assistant that would make all of our reservations and I was like, "No, I will make them all myself," because I wanted everything to be exactly the way I want it. But something like Disney where there are so many deadlines and there are so many things that like, this is an example where I think like, give it to the experts. Just be like, Christine, this is what I want, help me figure it out and then please make it happen so that I don't miss it, right?

Christine: It's like a game to me because sometimes you log on at 180 days and you can't always get every single thing. But what happens is people will grab reservations and then as it gets closer to their travel date, maybe they even decided not to travel, or maybe they changed their mind about what they wanted to do so they cancel things and then other things open up. So I'll sit down at night even when we're done for the day and I'm relaxing at night but I have my list next to me of what dining reservations I still want to try and get. And I just log in to see if I can get them, so it definitely is like, when I find out I'm like, score, I got it. I was like, yay.

Jill: You're like, swooping in and like, on the people who have like abandoned their reservations, that's so awesome. I love that. So okay, so what I'm hearing from this whole discussion today is early is the theme. Early to the race, early on the shuttle, early to the race, early in the corral.

Christine: Yes, early.

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Jill: Early to make your reservations, like, just don't be that person who is like, "Oh, it'll all get there when I get there," because you might miss out, right?

Christine: Yes, that is the theme.

Jill: That is the theme. I love it. It's - Disney is all about like, being in the right place at the right time. So okay, and the right place is always at the head of the race. The right place is always ahead of everyone else. So like, I'm looking at my list of questions because I had a million questions for you. You can't see it but it's so long. The last question that I have for you is after you run your race, do you just get to hang out at the park all day? Is that how it works?

Christine: Well, you can if you've purchased a park ticket.

Jill: Oh, okay. Right, and so people need to know that. That's literally just another thing that I would assume, I ran a race, I get to hang around. So you basically have to like, still get into the park, yeah?

Christine: I've never gone right to a park, I always want to shower. So that's - hop right onto resort bus, go back and shower, regroup, and then number one is wear your medals in the park because that is the reason you do put yourself through that torment is to walk around those parks with your medal on.

Jill: Awesome. Do you get like, special treatment from the characters if you're wearing your medal?

Christine: Everyone will say congratulations. I mean, you'll see other runners too with their medals on and then my friends and I, we make it a point to get a fast pass for character meet and greets so we can take pictures with the characters. Like, the 10K in January is always themed to

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Minnie Mouse, so we want Minnie Mouse to - a picture with Minnie Mouse with our Minnie Mouse medals. So you definitely want to take some character pictures.

Jill: I love that so much. What I would love to know is like, how people can work with you to book their vacations or just to kind of like, reach out to you and be like, "Hey, Christine, how do I make it happen?"

Christine: So I have a business page on Facebook, so it's actually Christine Surh, Vacation Planner. That's my Facebook business page. I have a full-on website that actually has a blog of where - just trip reports that I've gone on vacations. Some for Disney and actually some not to Disney, so there are a variety of things in there. And that's magicaladventuresawait.com is that website.

Jill: And just for anybody who's listening, we will have links to all that stuff in the show notes as well. And so on your blog, you talk about like, tips and tricks for Disney travel and...

Christine: I mostly talk about just my experiences at the Disney races.

Jill: Even better.

Christine: So not really tips, just my general days, things that we did and things like that.

Jill: That's good though because I think that like, people can get ideas. And now I just remembered what I was going to ask you. I was hoping it would come back to me. Alright, so I've heard this - can't remember where I heard it, but basically that you're not allowed to wear costumes. Like, you can't dress up as a Disney princess to Disney but like, there are sort of these on the DL ways of dressing so that you can identify each other. You know what I'm talking about?

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Christine: Disney bounding is what you're talking about.

Jill: What? It has a name. Oh my god, tell me everything.

Christine: Well really, I should have mentioned costumes when it comes to the races. I didn't because I never - I can't be bothered wearing other stuff when I'm running. But dressing up for Disney races is also a big thing. So people wear costumes and some of them I look at them and I'm like, why would you want to run six miles wearing that, but they look pretty cool, and that'll keep you entertained on the course too, checking out other people's costumes.

Jill: So you can dress up like the characters?

Christine: You can dress up, yes.

Jill: For the races?

Christine: For the races.

Jill: What's the craziest costume you've ever seen?

Christine: Oh, I saw someone dressed up like Bruce, he's the shark from Finding Nemo, and it was a full on like, with his head just sticking out the shark's mouth and it had to be a million degrees inside.

Jill: Can you imagine what it smelt like inside that costume? Oh my god.

Christine: Yeah, no. No. And the 5K, families will dress up like, really cute. Like The Incredibles and all be dressed up like The Incredible family and yeah.

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Jill: But so tell me more about this bounding this.

Christine: So bounding, it is true, like, as an adult - kids can dress up, but as an adult, you're not supposed to look so much like the character that a child might mistake you for a Disney employee dressed up like the character and want like, your autograph or to take a photo with you. I think that's the main purpose of not allowing adults to dress like that. So just say you wanted to dress like Snow White, they would wear like - Disney bounding would wear a skirt and a shirt that are the same theme and colors as Snow White's dress but not actually Snow White. Sometimes it's subtle, and sometimes it's less subtle. But yeah, if you Google Disney bounding, you'll find tons of stuff.

Jill: Google Disney bounding. You know what, that's exactly what I'm going to do after I get off this call because I need to know everything about it. And here's - I'm like, oh my gosh, well if I were to go, if I were to go to Disney and I wanted to dress up like one of the Star Wars characters, like...

Christine: Yeah, that's going to be a like, a whole new level of I don't know what.

Jill: Right? I'm like, what if you wanted to be a Storm Trooper? Like, just so many possibilities. I'm going to Google it after we're done. thank you for like, sharing that with me because that's - so okay, let's go through your contact information one more time before we sign off for the day.

Christine: Yes, so on Facebook it's Christine Surh, Vacation Planner, that's my business page there. And then my website is magicaladventuresawait.com.

Jill: I love it. And we're going to have links to all that in the show notes and you guys, like, check out. Christine knows everything about Disney travel, Disney races, like she's been through like, all different kinds of experiences

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there, she really knows a lot of stuff. So you can also find Christine in the *Not Your Average Runner* podcast community where every time somebody says how do I get to a Disney race, I tag her. So if you have questions for her and you want to find out more about like, Disney travel or whatever, go in the group, join the Facebook community, notyouraveragerunner.com/community. Anyway, thank you so much, Christine for being here today and yeah, I know you're doing that marathon in January and - no wait, when is your marathon? It's in September.

Christine: November. New York City.

Jill: It's November, oh my gosh, I keep forgetting. And so, yeah, I'm like, super excited to watch you run your first marathon and then for your run at Disney. Alright, have an amazing evening. Thank you so much.

Christine: Thank you.

Jill: Bye.

Christine: Bye.

Hey rebels, I hope you enjoyed my chat with Christine, and that's for bearing with us through all of the sound quality issues. And I just want you to know, if you want to get more of her magic, you can find all of it at magicaladventuresawait.com, that's her website. You can also find her on Facebook at facebook.com/magicaladventuresawait, or you can just email her directly at christine.surh@mei-travel.com. And all of those websites and all of those - her email address and everything are available in the show notes for this episode at notyouraveragerunner.com/30.

And here's something that we realized after the fact that we forgot to mention. There is zero cost to using her as a travel agent. Like, you literally pay nothing extra for her to help you figure out what the best way to play

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your trip is. So really, it's a win-win. So I hope that you - if you're planning to do some Disney travel, if you're planning to a Disney race, I hope you have a chat with her because I think she's really going to be able to help you make your trip the best trip possible.

Okay folks, I will talk to you next week, and until then, happy running.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you liked what you heard and want more, head over to www.notyouraveragerunner.com to download your free one-week jumpstart plan and get started running today.