

Disney 'checks in' with Gowalla with custom trips

November 18 2010

(AP) -- Visitors to Disney's theme parks in the U.S. can now use their smart phones not just to "check in" to the resorts, but earn digital versions of the parks' popular pins and go on custom-designed tours.

It's part of a new partnership between the Walt Disney Co. and Gowalla, one of a growing number of startups that lets users broadcast their location to friends and strangers using a [phone application](#). By far the biggest among them is Facebook, whose Places feature lets users share where they are and get special deals and coupons from businesses for doing so.

Facebook's recent foray into location services signals that the practice is set to grow more mainstream, though just 4 percent of the U.S. Internet population has ever used such a service and just 1 percent on any given day, according to a survey in August and September by the Pew Internet and American Life Project. [Facebook](#), though, announced its location feature in mid-August, so it's likely that the use of these services has grown since then, even if only a tiny fraction of the site's 500 million users have signed on.

As part of the Disney promotion, Gowalla has created custom trips its users can take as they make their way through Disney World in Florida and Disneyland in California. Families with kids "under 44 inches" at the Magic Kingdom in Florida, for example, are guided to "Mickey's PhilharMagic," Dumbo the Flying Elephant and Peter Pan's Flight, among other attractions.

Such trips, along with the ability to share photos, recommendations and trips you went on with friends, set Gowalla apart from other location-based services, though its user base is smaller than rival Foursquare.

Visitors will also be able to get more than 100 virtual passport stamps and pins using Gowalla when they visit the parks. Think of them as digital versions of the real-life pins that Disney fans buy, collect and trade.

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Citation: Disney 'checks in' with Gowalla with custom trips (2010, November 18) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-11-disney-gowalla-custom.html>

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