

A Trio of Backstage Disney Tours: A Walt Disney World Tour Review

by Jennifer Lambert, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I am a Disney addict and during my most recent trip to Walt Disney World my husband and I decided to try something new, so we took three different Disney tours.

The first was a tour of the BoardWalk resort; the second was a tour of the United Kingdom Pavilion highlighting Twining's tea, and the final was a backstage park tour at the Magic Kingdom.

The first tour we took was a special offering during the EPCOT Flower and Garden Festival. Tours are offered at 3:15 pm and 6:15 pm most days; and advance sign up is required. We had tried to sign up a day earlier; but the tour capacity of 22 people had already been reached; so our second day in the parks we signed up mid-morning for the 3:15 tour. Sign up is done via a sheet in the Tea Caddy shop in the EPCOT UK Pavilion.

□ We arrived 10 minutes prior to tour time and confirmed our attendance. The UK cast member gave us clip-on tour badges (to be returned at the end of the tour) and told us to wait in the garden courtyard for our guide. Our guide was another UK cast member from Ireland, who took us around the UK garden to explain the process of growing the proper herbs used in tea-making and how different plants produce different teas. The garden walk is not exclusive to the guided tour; anyone can walk around and read the Twinings signs that talk about the respective teas. Our tour guide talked about green vs. black teas, how teas are caffeinated and how different plants make different teas and tea flavors. The tour lasted about 30 minutes and is a walking tour in the garden. The tour is notably sponsored by Twining's, which is the key product sold in the Tea Caddy shop. Our guide was very knowledgeable and funny; not too stuffy for a tour about proper English tea! After the tour was over and we turned in our badges each participant was given a sample pack of Twining's tea bags to take home. Oh, and did I mention; this tour was FREE?!

□ The tour of the tea garden was not our only free tour; however. Our second experience took us to the BoardWalk Inn. No sign-up is required for this tour, and again it is FREE. We were advised by the cast member working the counter at the Belle Vue Lounge at the BoardWalk Inn to look for our tour guide at about 9:00 am, and that was all that was to it. Our guide asked if we had small children in our party (we did not) and

also said that his tour lasts more than the advertised 45 minutes; so it was a fair warning. He mentioned that the tour focused on art and artifacts; that small children would be bored very quickly; so the tour is more for teens/ adults.

Our guide was Pete from Denmark; who was very knowledgeable in art and art history. The official name of the tour was the BoardWalk Ballyhoo Tour and to learn what Ballyhoo is, you are going to have to take the tour yourself! We started the tour right in the meeting place; the Belle Vue Lounge, where our guide explained many of the art works hanging on the walls and in the elevator corridor. We even discussed the rattan furniture in the lounge. Our guide was very knowledgeable and put us to the test. He would ask us questions and thoughts while explaining about the items.

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□ From the lounge we went into the main lobby of the BoardWalk Inn, including the entryway and lobby itself. We talked about the miniature carousel in the lobby as well as the massive chandelier that hangs over it. We proceeded further into the lobby seating area to talk about the "Elephant in the room" -- her name is Lucy and she is from New Jersey. We also learned what a nanny chair is. From there we went outside to learn about the pool and the boardwalk itself. We finished the tour at Sea Shore Sweets with a discussion about the Miss America Pageant and the pageant's ties to Atlantic City.

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□ To cap off the tour we were offered a free sample of ice cream at Sea Shore Sweets, which was not yet open for the day. Our experience was that the tour was very long; almost 2 hours; far longer than the advertised time of 45 minutes; however we were given fair warning and told we could leave the tour at any time for other commitments.

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□ The tour we were most excited to take was the Marceline to Magic Tour at the Magic Kingdom, which started before park opening. I called within the 30-day window to 407-WDW-TOUR to make our reservation. We are Disney Visa credit card members, so we received a 20% discount on the tour price of \$30 per person, what a deal! When calling for the reservation the cast member advised me of the tour duration (approximately 2 ½ to 3 hours) and that our tour would be a walking tour, to ensure that we wore comfortable shoes. I was also advised that the tour required park admission and to arrive with government-issued identification by 8:00 am at the Chamber of Commerce on Main Street USA. The tour start time is 8:15 am, which on most days is before park opening.

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□ Upon arrival to the Magic Kingdom we followed the signs directing guests with tour and/or early dining reservations to the park entry. We

entered the park and checked in. We were given keepsake name badges bearing the tour name and a classic image of Walt Disney, with our own names labeled in the "Disney font." We were also given personalized listening devices that connected to a microphone worn by our guide; she didn't have to shout and we could clearly hear her. We were offered a free bottle of water and waited for our guide. Because the park was not yet officially open, we had an opportunity to see a quiet Main Street USA; which is a treat itself!

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□Our group of 14 gathered with our guide and we began the tour right down Main Street USA, which was modeled after Walt Disney's hometown of Marceline, Missouri. From Main Street we headed to the official gateway to Liberty Square, via the hub. Wait, Liberty Square has an official entrance? I never knew that. There was an official sign and everything, something I've missed all of these years because of the crowds and being in a hurry. We talked about Walt's patriotism and the original concept for a street off of Main Street USA that was going to have a similar theme.

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□From the entrance; we stopped at the carriage house in the queue for the Haunted Mansion. Our guide explained the level of detail that the Imagineers applied, to make this carriage house as authentic as possible. We made several stops in the Haunted Mansion's interactive queue, looking at details. We stopped at the busts and talked about the murder mystery that goes with them. Most of us (myself included) pass by the busts as great photo opportunities; but fail to read what the epitaphs say. Read them next time you visit; you will discover who was murdered in the mansion, how, and perhaps why. Further into the queue, we stopped to see gravestone tributes to Marc Davis and Xavier Atencio, two of the Imagineers that worked on the attraction. We also learned that the hieroglyphic symbols on the books have a secret meaning, but you have to decode it. When waiting in line we were also told to team up and have one person touch each of the musical instruments and they would play the entire Grim Grinning Ghosts, but every instrument must be touched at the same time!

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□From the queue we waited in line and were some of the first guests to ride the attraction for the day. Our guide continued to give us great backstage information during the attraction; we were able to hear her as we rode through thanks to our audio devices. We learned that the only human you see in the attraction is the caretaker in the final scene (with his dog). I also learned that Paul Frees (the voice of the Ghost Host) is depicted in one of the portraits in the Stretching Room, (look for the man in the bowler hat).

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□After our ride, we stopped at the pet cemetery for some additional

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Imagineering details and then headed off to the left to the new Tangled-themed restrooms in Fantasyland, BUT we didn't stop for a break. Our guide stopped at a very large door and asked us if we would like to see something special backstage. (YES, please!). We were instructed to turn off any cameras and headed backstage. This was the moment I was waiting for. We went underneath the Haunted Mansion attraction to the ballroom scene to see how the illusion using the Pepper's Ghost technique was created! It was AMAZING! After going backstage, our guide said she had teased us enough and we did actually take a break at the Tangled restrooms, she pointed out the incredible details that went into these restrooms; the most themed ones on property!

□ From there we went to visit another attraction; Winnie the Pooh - quite a different attraction from the Haunted Mansion... or was it? Our guide got us FastPass access to the ride and instructed us to look for techniques used in Pooh that we also saw in the Mansion.

□ From Fantasyland we headed to Tomorrowland; focusing on one of the attractions that Walt Disney had actually experienced (via the 1964-1965 World's Fair), The Carousel of Progress. Our guide gave us a little World's Fair history and we watched one of the two videos that show in the queue. We were able to see Walt Disney along with the Sherman brothers pitching the attraction's theme song (It's a Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow) to the pavilion's sponsor for the fair, General Electric. We then had a private viewing of the show, which once again was accompanied by wonderful hidden facts and trivia about the attraction, provided by our guide over our headphones. We learned about a cat that is in every scene (though sometimes hard to find), and looked for tributes to General Electric in the show. After our show our tour guide did a wrap-up, we turned our headphones in (we were able to keep our name badges), and were set loose in the park. Our tour was a great tribute to Walt Disney, and I highly recommend it. It's a shorter version of the Keys to the Kingdom tour (which is my goal for our next trip!!).

□ All Walt Disney World tour information can be found at <https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/events-tours/> or by calling 407-WDW-TOUR. Discounts may apply, such as for Disney Visa Card Members, Disney Vacation Club, or Annual Passholders - just ask the cast member you speak with. There are even special tours that run seasonally; check the Disney website for the most current tours offered.

About The Author: Jennifer is a Disney veteran and suffers from Disney-itis very badly. She visited Walt Disney World for the first time when she was

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just 6 months old. Jennifer and her husband Dave has been to Walt Disney World several times, cruised on the Disney Dream in 2012, and visited Disneyland in 2012 and 2013. She is the local Disney expert to friends, family and co-workers, excited to share experiences and advice whenever needed about her favorite place on earth!

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