

The 2015 Epcot International Flower and Garden Festival: A Walt Disney World Event Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

I want to start with a disclaimer here. The last time we were at the Flower and Garden Festival in Epcot was back in spring 2011, so I can't compare this year's festival to last year's.

What I can do is compare it to three previous visits over the last decade.

The first element that was brand new to us, but had been in the festival previously, were the Outdoor Kitchens. I was excited about trying these out, as we've always enjoyed sampling items from the Food and Wine Festival booths. In total this year, there are 12 Outdoor Kitchens, and having already checked out the choices on AllEars.Net, I had a good idea of what I wanted to try.

□ I found the samples filled me up very quickly, which sadly meant I didn't get to try as much as I would have liked. The first Outdoor Kitchen I was intrigued by was the Pineapple Promenade by the entrance to World Showcase, given pineapples are one of my favorite foods. I ended up getting the pineapple soft-serve, which was very enjoyable. Plans to enjoy the version with either Sammy's Beach Bar Red Head Macadamia Nut Flavored Rum or Parrot Bay Coconut Rum sadly went out of the window, as I wasn't well by the time the festival started. However, I did indulge in the sparkling pineapple wine, from the Florida Orange Groves Winery, St. Petersburg, Florida. Interestingly, it wasn't as sweet as I expected it to be, but it was still very palatable and I managed, even in my ill state, to force the entire glass down!

□ Florida Fresh, located just before you get to Germany from the Outpost, was another must-do for me, as I loved the sound of the watermelon salad with pickled onions, B&W farm baby arugula, feta cheese and balsamic vinegar, and it was certainly a refreshing mixture of flavors. My husband sampled the shrimp and stone ground grits with andouille sausage, sweet corn, tomatoes and cilantro, but was a bit underwhelmed by it, describing it as being "soupy" towards the bottom. He also got a key lime sparkling wine from the same winery as the pineapple sparkling wine came from. It was a little too sharp for me, although I enjoyed the watermelon passion fruit slush, perfect for my sweet tooth!

Other things perfect for my sweet tooth were the limoncello panna

cotta from Primavera Kitchen in Italy, which was perhaps my favorite of everything I tried, and the exceptionally unusual frushi from Hanami in Japan -- fresh pineapple, strawberries and melon, rolled with coconut rice, topped with raspberry sauce, sprinkled with toasted coconut and served with whipped cream on the side.

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□Some of the other Outdoor Kitchens we didn't even get to try anything from included Fleur de Lys in France, Botanas Botanico in Morocco, celebrating Latin American cuisine, and Jardin de Fiestas in Mexico.

Next time we're at Epcot for the Flower and Garden Festival, I will definitely ensure we allow a couple of meal times to enjoy the offerings from the Outdoor Kitchen, as I really didn't feel we did them justice on this trip.

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□Moving away from food, and back to the central pillar of this festival, let's talk flowers, and more specifically the stunning topiaries Disney produces each year. A lot of the old favorites were back, including the Lion King, Fantasia, and Lightning McQueen and Tow Mater, although there were a number I missed this year. Seeing Winnie the Pooh in the United Kingdom without his friends was very sad, although the creative display of Captain Hook, Tic Toc and Peter Pan went some way to making up for that. A Cast Member told us it took her two days before she spotted Peter Pan, although we did clock where he was straight away.

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□China was perhaps the biggest disappointment to us, with none of the pandas from previous years. Instead a topiary sheep to represent the year of the sheep, which looked more like a goat to us, replaced them. And there was no dragon outside the Temple of Heaven this year, which I thought was a huge shame, especially given that the calendars and other festival merchandise we saw all seemed to feature images of him.

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□Anna and Elsa are the showpiece at the entrance to World Showcase this year, and I have to say they are absolutely stunning. Their faces look perfect, and I was personally fascinated by Elsa's hands, they just seemed so lifelike.

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□I was shocked to read in the publicity material that this would be the first year that Chip and Dale had been featured in the festival in topiary form, and looking at them, I have no idea why it took designers that long to include them, as they were lovely. Other major topiaries included Farmer Mickey and Minnie, greeting you as you walk back into Future World from World Showcase and the delightful Seven Dwarves and Snow White in Germany, with everyone of them so expressive.

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□We were there for the first few days of the festival, and I suspect some

areas weren't quite at their best. Although still stunning, the festival blooms flowerbeds between Future World and World Showcase definitely still had some way to go to get to their best, which was a bit disappointing. I think the next time, we'll be sure to avoid the opening few days, and perhaps go mid-season instead.

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□It's also worth knowing that the Festival Center, located in the former Wonders of Life pavilion is only open Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Someone commented to me that they were surprised it wasn't open on the opening day of the festival, and I have to be honest, that surprised me too. Even if you don't see any of the demonstrations there, it's well worth a visit, as there's a history of Disney agriculture, and details of how they create the topiaries, all of which I found fascinating.

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□This year, there are also various gardens to explore, including the Gardener's Palette and the Disney Pixar Inside Out Emotion Garden, both showcasing some stunning colors, as plants are grouped together by color. You can also get a festival passport and, as well as the Outdoor Kitchens, you can get stamps at some of the gardens, and even some of the stalls, something I really enjoyed doing.

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□Perhaps my favorite was Butterflies on the Go, definitely an area you need to take your time with, as if you rush through, like some people did, the chances are you won't see a single butterfly. We really enjoyed spending time in here, especially as we found a guy who was literally a butterfly magnet, but we also noticed that if it became too crowded, they will stop anyone else going in there, something I'd never realised they did.

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□Kids won't miss out, with various play areas. My favorite was the delightful Mike and Sully's Monstrous Garden, with areas for different ages. I loved the footprints on the grass, very creative! The play area by the Cactus Road Rally, where you'll find the Cars topiaries, certainly had plenty of seating for adults to watch their young 'uns blow off steam.

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□This year, we really liked the festival merchandise, and if you're an Annual Passholder, be sure to enquire about what you can get. It's not necessarily on display, and we only got the pin and T-shirt after hearing someone else enquiring, and seeing what was on offer. There are also lots of stalls to explore around World Showcase, some offering really unique products. If only we hadn't had a weight limit on our suitcases on the flight back, we could've bought so much more!

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□Despite what it may sound like, I still really enjoyed the Flower and Garden Festival, and for us, the addition of the Outdoor Kitchens was a wonderful one. Of course, topiaries will always come and go, and I have

to accept that, but the major lesson I learnt from this year's visit, is to perhaps not go for the first few days of the festival, but to give all the amazing blooms the chance to really come into their full splendor.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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